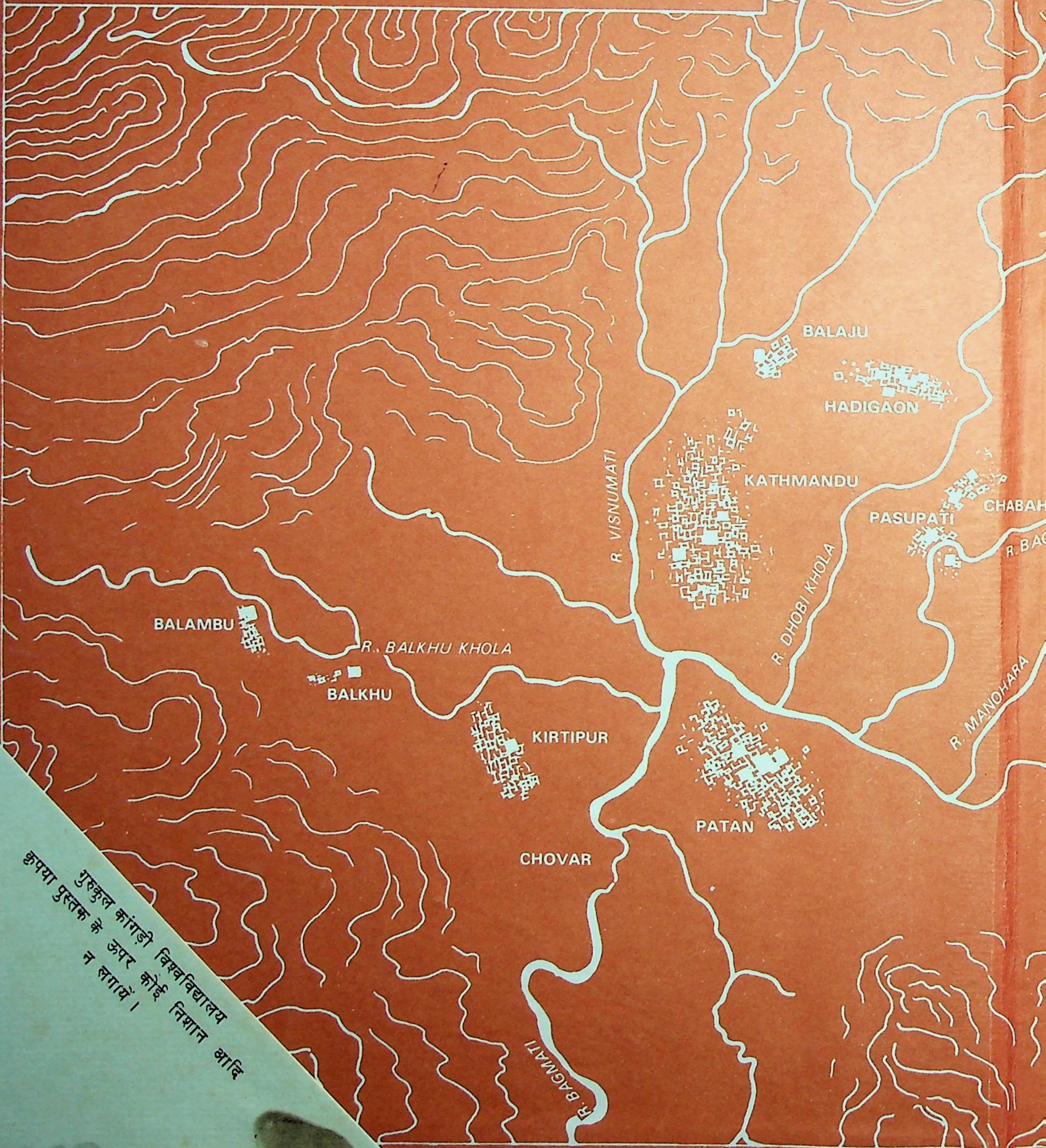
The Early Sculptures of Nepal

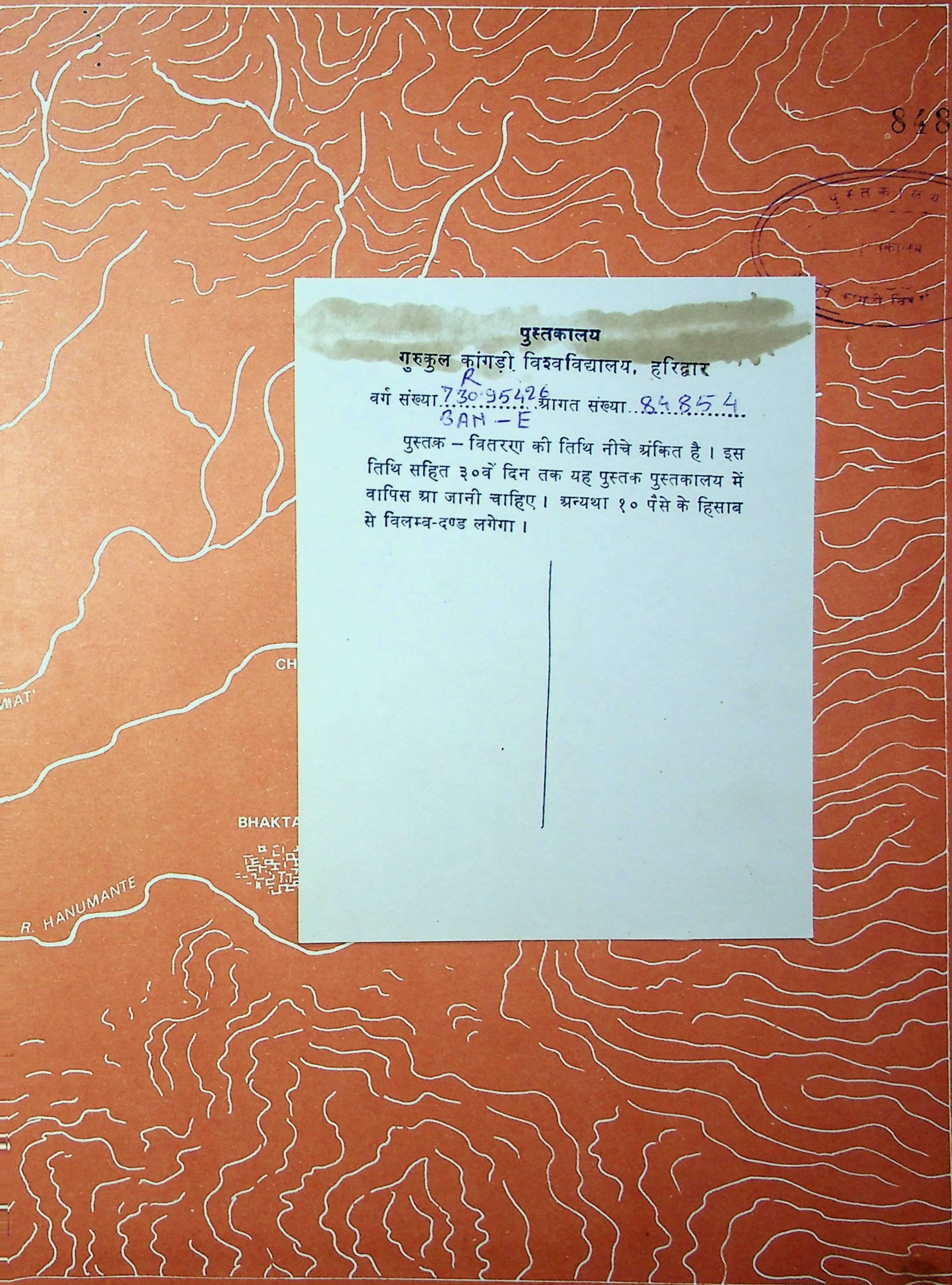


Lain S Bangdel

Nepal

MAIN SITES WHERE EARLY SCULPTURES WERE FOUND




R. HANUMANTE

THE EARLY SCULPTURES OF NEPAL



The

Early Sculptures of Nepal

Lain S Bangdel

Foreword by **Krishna Deva**

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To the memory of my father
Sri Ranglall Bangdel (1880-1957)

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Contents

Foreword

That the art of Nepal is not just a provincial school of Indian art but has had its own personality through the ages is now widely admitted. Its history is not less than two thousand years old and starts with the torso of a sculpture which was identified by its discoverers as a Yaksha-Bodhisattva and dated to the second century A.D. The torso was recognized by the writer of these lines as a Yaksha image, assignable to the first century A.D., a view endorsed by the author of this book.

The author, who is an intellectual luminary and a creative artist of Nepal, indeed combines a deep knowledge of Indian and Nepali art with an instinctive feel for the Nepali tradition and is thus better equipped than many to appreciate the meaning, content and sequence of the art works of his country. He has utilised his critical talents and experience as an artist to explore the obscure beginning of Nepal's art in this book.

The author rightly feels that the earliest art expressions in Nepal, as in India, should represent the divinities of primitive folk cults, such as the Yakshas, Nagas and various forms of the Mother Goddess. He has successfully identified a large number of early images of these deities which are generally characterized by bulky volume, lack of sophistication and certain distinctive traits of stance, drapery, coiffure, ornaments and iconographical formulae. An icongraphic trait common to a majority of these images is that their right hands are stretched in an awkward cupped fashion in what looks like the *varadamudra*. He has traced parallels for these sculptures in the Kushana art of Mathura and has justifiably concluded that the early art of Nepal was largely inspired by Mathura, but retained its individuality and steered its own course of evolution.

The author, who shoulders the onerous responsibilities of his august office, has religiously gone out on almost every weekly holiday for several years (for a major part of 1974 in the company of the writer of these lines), prying into each nook and corner of Kathmandu and Patan and the neighbouring villages discovering and photographing a large number of old images, many of them hitherto unknown. Among his important discoveries may be mentioned Gaja-Laksmi (Pl. 7) from Naihiti (Patan), Chaturmurti (Pls. 63-66) preserved in Rashtriya Nachghar, Mahisamardini (Pl. 59) from Hadigaon, and Kubera (Pl. 76) and Vishnu (Pls. 119-121) from the Satyanarayana temple at Hadigaon.

The early art of Nepal has yielded some highly controversial figures which have been variously interpreted by earlier writers. Mr. Bangdel had necessarily to discuss these figures which include the so-called Kirata King (Pl. 85) from Mrigasthali, the seated deity with a rayed halo (Pl. 86) from Aryaghat, the enigmatic cluster of five figures (Pls. 81-84) from the Kumbhesvara temple, Patan, and the so-called Naga bust atop a jar (Pls. 79-80) exhibited in the National Museum, Kathmandu. The explanations offered for these figures by Mr Bangdel are quite illuminating and deserve serious consideration. In particular his interpretation of the last figure as the "Amrita-ghata of Kubera guarded by the serpents" is highly commendable and convincing.

This book is indeed a labour of love for Mr. Bangdel who has tried to study the origin and development of Nepal's art mainly from an artist's viewpoint against the background of her history and

tradition. One may not sometimes agree with the dates suggested by him for certain sculptures, but it will be seen that the chronology proposed by him has logic and consistency. The treatment throughout is lucid and perceptive and the book makes an original contribution to an understanding of the art of Nepal.

Varanasi

KRISHNA DEVA

Preface

Until recently it was generally believed that the art of Nepal was of secondary importance to the Gupta art of India; however, recent studies described in this book have revealed that the sculptures of Nepal rest on their own merit and have a long continuous history dating from the 1st century A.D., if not earlier.

As in India, the folk cults of the Yakshas, Nagas and fertility goddesses seem to have been very popular in the valley of Kathmandu from the beginning of the Christian era. The earlier sculpture of a Yaksha, discovered at Hadigaon, and numerous images of Mother Goddesses found throughout the valley reveal an early tradition which was largely devoted to cult-worship of folk divinities.

A few scholars have hinted that Mathura was the primary source of inspiration for the early art of Nepal. This is now becoming clearer as specimens of sculptures with similar forms and icons have recently come to light. Mathura, known to be the greatest centre of early Indian art, especially under Kushana rule, had various representations of folk divinities, including Mother Goddesses of anthropomorphic or mixed zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms. In Nepal too, not only Yakshas, Nagas and Kuberas but also female tutelary divinities, worshipped as Mother Goddesses in anthropomorphic form, were overwhelmingly popular among the early settlers of the valley. This is clearly reflected in the early art of Nepal.

The primary objects of this book are to satisty a long standing need for a study of the obscure beginning of the early art of Nepal and to establish a chronological framework for its ancient sculptural heritage. During the author's research, a significant feature has been the discovery in the Kathmandu valley of a number of early sculptures unknown to previous writers. For the first time these materials have been carefully examined, for iconography, tradition and style are the most important elements in dating ancient sculptures. It is hoped that this detailed and systematic study will throw new light on the history of Nepalese art.

For the preparation of this book, to Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, Joint Educational Advisor, Ministry of Education, Government of India, and those friends who helped in various ways, I would like to express my sincere thanks. I am greatly indebted to my friend, Dr. N.R. Banerjee, the former Director, National Museum, New Delhi, who stayed more than six years in Nepal as an advisor to the Archaeological Department, His Majesty's Government, for his friendly cooperation and invaluable guidance on the sculptural art of Nepal. I also owe a profound debt of gratitude to my friend, Mr. Krishna Deva, known for his knowledge and experience in Indian art and archaeology, for kindly writing the foreword for this book. It was Mr. Deva who opened a new horizon for me in the field of the ancient sculpture of Nepal during his two years' stay in Kathmandu as an advisor to the Archaeological Department of His Majesty's Government.

I should also like to express my indebtedness to Mr. Ramesh Jung Thapa, Director General of the Archaeological Department, His Majesty's Government, and senior staff members, Mr. Janaklall Sharma, Mr. B.K. Rijal, Mr. Hemraj Sakya, Mr. Sanuraj Sakya, Mr. Vishnu Prasad Khanal and Mr. Pasupati Dwivedi of the National Museum, Kathmandu, for their kind and friendly assistance.

Dr. Robert Fleming, Sr., an ornithologist and also a family friend, has always encouraged me to write a book on the art of Nepal expressing my views as an artist. He has kindly read through the entire manuscript of this book and I am indeed very grateful to him.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Mr. Surya Bikram Gewali, the former Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy, Kathmandu, whose guidance has shaped my artistic and literary pursuits since high school when I was his student. A brilliant historian himself, his guidance with regard to the study of ancient history and the early people of Nepal sometimes worked like flashes of a torch while I was groping about in the dark, unexplored passages of our country's history.

Lastly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mrs. Barbara Horbey for kindly reading the entire text and for her scholarly suggestions.

Kathmandu, 1982 LAIN S. BANGDEL

Introduction

The kingdom of Nepal stretches for about five hundred miles across the southern slope of the Himalayas. Within its boundaries is a chain of mountains which includes the highest peak in the world, Sagarmatha (Mount Everest). Beyond the Himalayan border to the north lies the plateau of Tibet, known as the roof of the world. In the southern region, the plains of the Tarai form a belt across the country, gradually merging into the vast Gangetic plain of India.

The northern frontiers form an almost impassable barrier, although the first route to Tibet, now part of The People's Republic of China, was opened as early as the 7th century A.D. In the northern region, where man lives up to a height of 14,000 ft above sea level, are either barren lands or conifers and alpine meadows. Cold strong winds blow in winter during the afternoon until sunset. There is heavy snowfall and the nomadic people leave their homes and descend with their cattle to the southern regions where the winter is mild. The people living in the north belong mostly to the Mongoloid stock and speak Tibeto-Burman languages.

The country stretches for about one hundred and fifty miles from north to south and contains a variety of terrain and climate, from the alpine zone of the north to the tropical one of the Tarai. Mighty rivers such as the Kosi, Gandaki, Karnali and Mahakali, along with their numerous tributaries, rush from the lofty summits to the plains of India and finally merge into the holy Ganges.

Unlike the desolate areas of the north, the southern belt, with alluvial soil, is the most fertile region. The entire southern frontier, from east to west, is adjacent to the vast Gangetic plain; consequently, from the distant past various religions and cultural influences flowed from the Indian subcontinent into Nepal.

Between the mountainous regions of the north and the plains of the south, lie the midlands, the most populated region of Nepal. The hills rise abruptly from the southern plains and merge with the Siwalik hills about 3,000 ft above sea level. Slightly further north, a chain of mountains known as the Mahabharata Lekh, runs from west to east, extending from the frontier of Kumaon in India to Sikkim in the east. The Siwalik hills are parallel to the Mahabharata Lekh and form a natural barrier.

The midland region offers an agreeable climate for habitation as well as for agriculture. The picturesque valley of Kathmandu, which cradles the ancient art and culture of Nepal, lies in the midland. Here, civilization has flourished from time immemorial. The valley has been the seat of the capital city of the kingdom since the Licchavi times—*ca.* A.D. 400 to 750. It is extremely fertile due to having been the bed of a great lake which, according to some geologists, dried up about two hundred thousand years ago.[1]

Despite the small size of the country, the ethnic variety of Nepal is surprisingly great. Various ethnic groups and tribes live in different areas and speak numerous dialects of their own, although

[1] Toni Hagen, *Nepal, the Kingdom in the Himalayas*, Berne, Kummerly & Frey, Ltd., Geographical Institute, 1961, p.53.
Hagen has given a rough estimate that the great lake of the valley dried up 200,000 years ago and in the organic movement the valley was raised about 650 ft.

Nepali is now the national language. Besides the Brahmins and Kshatriyas who belong to the Indo-Aryan group, major ethnic elements are the Newars, Tamangs, Magars, Gurungs, Rais, Limbus and Tharus. These groups belong primarily to the Mongoloid stock. However, due to admixture with Aryans, some, such as the Newars of Kathmandu valley, have sharp facial features.

The racial history of Nepal and especially the origin of the Sakyas and Mallas, who still live in great numbers in the valley, and the Licchavis, has been difficult to trace. Though these tribes were well-known during the time of the Buddha in the 6th century B.C., their direct link with the history of Nepal could not possibly be established until now for lack of evidence.

The authenticated history of Nepal takes positive shape only from the middle of the 5th century A.D. when we come across the earliest inscription of king Manadeva of the Licchavi dynasty in the year A.D. 464. This is found in the stone pillar at Changu Narayana temple about ten kilometres north-east of Kathmandu. From this period onwards available epigraphic records help us to construct a chronological framework of the rulers who represented the Licchavi, Thakuri, Malla and Shah dynasties.

The early history of the Kathmandu valley, like other ancient cities of the world, is replete with numerous legends—legends connected with every temple shrine, water-spout or locality. Although such traditions are very strong and indeed deeply rooted in the minds of people, they nevertheless lack historical or archaeological evidence.

Before discussing this aspect in detail, let us first deal with the earliest people who lived in Nepal and its neighbouring countries. From the time of the Aryan penetration into the north-western region of the Indian subcontinent about two thousand years before Christ, the Greeks, the nomadic Scythians, the Kushanas, and the Hunas left a lasting impression which eventually formed what we now know as the great Indian civilization. But recent excavations and discoveries in various parts of India and its neighbouring countries are shedding a new and most interesting light on these early civilizations of several thousand years ago. Archaeological and anthropological pundits are amazed at how such discoveries reveal many unknown and hitherto unsuspected layers of buried civilizations. Since the discoveries in 1920-21 of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, a civilization that sprang up about five thousand years ago, other new discoveries have recently been made. An example is the finding of rock shelters with prehistoric paintings at Bhim Bhetka in Madhya Pradesh, India. Here, a continuous sequence of cave culture and prehistoric art flourished from the early palaeolithic times (60,000-10,000 B.C.) to the historical period (1000 B.C.).[1] It is surmised that primitive man's religion was based on animal worship because the rock shelters have gigantic animal drawings that indeed create awe and wonder in the mind of the spectator. This suggests that animals may have been symbols of early divinities. Rhinocerii, bulls, tigers, elephants, sambhar and wild boar were painted on the rocks. It was also found that mother worship appeared to be the main religious theme.

These primitive men from Madhya Pradesh were not the earliest people to spread out to other places of India. In the opinion of some experts such as Professor S.R. Chopra,[2] early man lived in the outer Himalayas, the Siwalik range, that extends all the way from Himachal Pradesh through Nepal, and eastward. The site between Marni and Pinjore in Haryana abounds in fossils of man's ancestors. Fossils of anthropoids, discovered in the Siwalik hills near Pinjore, are believed to be ten million years old, perhaps the oldest such fossils known.

It is interesting to note that new discoveries, though not directly relevant to the early history of mankind, continue to come to light. For instance, there are fossils of dinosaurs which were recently unearthed in the mountain regions of Tibet at an altitude of about 14,000 ft. above sea level. In Nepal too, mammal fossils, of twelve million years old, have now been found in the Siwalik range of Dang valley in western Nepal. These fossils are of a rhinoceros and of an extinct elephant. A few years ago, two Soviet anthropologists claim to have discovered some bones of protoman on the banks of the Danda river in western Nepal. Very recently, a USA-Nepal scientific expedition has found an eleven million years old

[1] Dr. Vishnu Sridhar Wakankar was perhaps the first archaeologist to discover the world's oldest rock painting at Bhim Bhetka, near Bhopal, India. During the author's visit to this site in early 1975, a team from Vikram University under Dr. Wakankar was exploring the sites. More than 1300 rock shelters at Bhim Bhetka have so far been discovered by them.

[2] In a paper presented to the Congress of Archaeologists and Anthropologists, in 1975, Professor Chopra, Head of the Department of Anthropology, Punjab University, who has been involved in field investigation in the Siwalik areas, reported the discovery of stone tools, dentation of an early monkey and fossils of homonoids from these sites.

hominid tooth in the rocks of the Himalayan foothills as evidence of the "first possible human ancestor, perhaps the oldest in Asia", near the Tanau river in Butwal, a south-western district of Nepal.Many anthropologists believe that the hominid Ramapithecus, is the direct ancestor of man. The oldest fossil of Ramapithecus, fourteen million years old, was found in Kenya, Africa, and the tooth of the hominid found in Nepal is the second oldest of its kind in the world.

Besides prehistoric discoveries, excavations in India and Nepal are unearthing many artefacts of early civilizations. During excavations in the Garhwal hills, the neighbouring frontier of western Nepal, many archaeological remains were found which give evidence of the history of hill areas that goes back to the 6th century B.C.

From recent excavations in the Tarai region of Nepal, such as at Tilaurakot, Paisa, Banjarahi and Lumbini, numerous findings reveal a sequence of successive cultures of the Maurya, Sunga, Kushana and Gupta periods. Evidently the settlement of Kapilavastu, now known as Tilaurakot, where Gautama Buddha spent his childhood and youth, must have taken place much earlier than the 6th century B.C. We know from early history that Kapilavastu was the land of the Sakya clan to which Buddha belonged. At the time of Buddha, Kapilavastu flourished along with other neighbouring republican states of the Koliyas (Buddha's maternal home), Mallas and Licchavis. Vaisali was the capital of the Licchavis and was the most powerful of the Vijjian republics. In addition to the Licchavis of Vaisali, the Koliyas of Ramagrama, the Mallas of Pava, the Moriyas of Pippalivana and the Sakyas of Kapilavastu were included in the Vijjian republic.

Ajatasatru, king of Magadha and son of Bimbisara, who was a contemporary of Buddha, waged war against the Licchavis, destroyed them and annexed the republic of Vaisali to his own kingdom. The Licchavis most probably took refuge either in the neighbouring states or fled to the northern territory in the foothills of the Himalayas because of the ruthless persecution of Ajatasatru. In the opinion of Misra, "the Licchavis left Vaisali and took refuge in Nepal where they ruled for a long time".[1] The Sakyas also met with a similar disastrous fate when Birudhaka, king of Kosala and son of Prasenajit, attacked and drove them out of their homes.

Nothing was known of the Licchavis nor of the other tribes for a long time. But after some nine hundred years of oblivion, we come across the name of the Licchavi king Manadeva, mentioned for the first time in the history of Nepal, in A.D. 464 in the pillar inscription of Manadeva at Changu Narayana. Here, king Manadeva gives the names of his forefathers in succession—Vrisadeva, Sankaradeva and Dharmadeva, who seem to have been the rulers before him.

In India, evidence of the recurrence of the name "Licchavi" took place a hundred years sooner than in Nepal. The name is on the coins of Chandragupta I (*ca.* A.D. 320-335). It is known from historical evidence that he married a Licchavi princess named Kumara Devi; this matrimonial alliance helped to establish the influence of the Licchavis in Magadha. Samudragupta I (A.D. 335-375), son of Chandragupta I, left an inscription at Allahabad in which it is mentioned that he was proud to be called the grandson of the Licchavis. This inscription also implies that Nepal was a border kingdom during the time of his reign. Samudragupta's inscription refers to the Licchavis *only once* when it calls the king "the grandson of the Licchavis". The inscription does not throw any light on the geographical location of the Licchavis. In any case, while the Licchavis were ruling in Nepal (*ca.* A.D. 400-750), the Guptas were the rulers of Magadha and later, northern Bengal. Obviously, the Licchavis of Nepal shared many aspects of language, script, culture, religion and art with the Guptas of India. However, long before the arrival of the Licchavis or other Indo-Aryan immigrants, the indigenous people who were non-Aryan had been living here for centuries. The earliest settlers spoke their own dialect, a non-Sanskrit language. In a number of ancient inscriptions, about eighty per cent of the local names of the valley have a non-Sanskritic origin. This linguistic evidence clearly indicates that this area was already occupied by a distinct ethnic group which belonged to a Mongoloid race who were most probably the Kiratas. But who were the Kiratas? It is known from the early history of India that long before the advent of the Aryans in the north, there were primarily three anthropological groups: the Dravidians, the Austrics and the Mongoloids. The Dravidians lived beyond the Vindhya hills in the south, the Austric tribes lived in the central as well as in the northern regions, while the Mongoloids inhabited the foothills of the Himalayas, and extended from Kashmir in the west, eastwards to Bengal and

[1] Y. Misra, *An Early History of Vaisali*, New Delhi, Motilal Banarasidas, 1968, p. 125.

Assam. Beyond Assam and Burma, the entire people of South East Asia belonged to various Mongoloid groups.

From the above accounts it may be surmised that the people who were living on the sub-Himalayan fringe were people of Mongoloid stock; they were undoubtedly the Kiratas known in Indian epic literature. In the *Mahabharata*, the Kiratas are mentioned as one of the tribes living in the north. Kalidasa in his *Kumarasambhava* described the Kiratas who lived beyond the river Ganges in the foothills of the Himalayas. In the *Yajurveda*, they are referred to as "*guhavya* Kirata". This indicates that they lived in caves and forests. They are said to be people of short stature with flat noses, high cheekbones and slanting eyes.

"Kirata" is a Sanskrit word which means "people who lived on the border". When the Aryans confronted the Kiratas, they found them to be primitive forest people who spoke their own dialect, which the Aryans could not understand. These Kiratas were shy, avoided strangers and lived by hunting and fishing. Sanskrit literature alludes to the marksmanship of the Kiratas whose main weapons were bows and arrows. Even to this day, one may find in the southern regions of Nepal various small tribal groups such as the Chepang, Satar, Darai and Rawtey who are still bow and arrow people, living in a most primitive way.

Among different elements of tribal groups, there are three major ethnic tribes in Nepal: the Tharus, the Jyapus, and the Rais and Limbus whose physiognomy is similar. The Tharus, an ancient tribe, occupy mostly the Tarai areas of low forested hills, while the Rais and Limbus live in the eastern districts of Nepal, between the Kosi and Arun rivers and claim to be Kiratas. Distinct from the rest of the tribes are the Jyapus of Kathmandu valley associated with the Newars. They are mostly farmers with a distinct ethnic character, and were most likely the earliest settlers of the valley. Like the Tharus they live together in closely-knit groups with a strong sense of ethnic solidarity. Several indirect sources of evidence indicate that the ancestors of the Jyapus were the Kiratas of non-Aryan stock.

The early history of Nepal is full of colourful legends but there is no positive evidence from which one can construct a chronological history of the country. There are some early references, such as the Buddhist text *Mulasarvasthivadavinaya*, which give us some hints that Nepal was already trading with India during the time of Buddha. One of the earliest of these occurs in the *Arthasastra* of Kautilya. It also says specifically that woollen blankets from Nepal were imported into the Magadhan empire. And until a few decades ago these blankets were in great demand in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Thus Nepal was known to the people of the Gangetic plain from very early times.

Was it the mountains of Nepal that always attracted outsiders as they do today? Indeed, the mighty Himalayas have excited the wonder and admiration of people for centuries. Visible from many parts of Nepal including the Tarai regions, the mysterious, ice-clad giants have stirred the imagination of poets and thinkers. The lofty peaks, for example Gauri-Shanker, evoking Siva and his consort Gauri are easily visible from the Kathmandu valley.[1] Among the countless peaks of the Himalayas, Mount Kailasa is believed to be the abode of the great god Siva Mahadeva. The almost unapproachable Himalayas have frequently been mentioned in the Vedas. Considering the magnificent grandeur of the Himalayas, one can well imagine the first impression of the earliest people in this valley, when they saw the snowclad peaks of Ganesa Himal, Langtang, Dorje Lakpa, Chobha-Bhamare and Gauri-Shanker bathed in the golden light of the setting sun from the Kathmandu valley!

No one can tell exactly when the soil of the valley was first trod upon by a human foot. In the absence of material relics of these prehistoric people, we are not in a position to trace the culture of the indigenous settlers.[2] Archaeological excavations alone may provide some clues. A few trial excavations at Dhumvarahi, near Hadigaon (an ancient village, now a thickly populated area in the north-west of Kathmandu) were carried out in the mid-Sixties but nothing was found that could be dated positively earlier than the 4th century A.D. We know, however, that the valley of Kathmandu was the seat of an ancient culture. Until a few decades ago, "Nepal" signified only the Kathmandu valley. The valley is drained by the main river, Bagmati, with its numerous tributaries that feed the land for cultivation. It is not only a sacred river but also the scene of an early civilization. It has played almost the same role as the Nile in Egypt, the

[1] Before Everest was discovered in the mid-19th century, Gauri-Shanker was considered by many people of the valley to be the highest mountain in the world.

[2] R.V. Joshi, "Prehistoric Exploration in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal," *Ancient India, Bulletin of the Archaeological Survey of India*, no. 22, 1966. Dr. Joshi carried out prehistoric exploration in the Kathmandu valley in 1961 but no prehistoric remains as such were found.

Indus in Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, the Euphrates and Tigris in Mesopotamia, the Ganga and Jamuna in India, and the Hwang-ho in China.

It is most likely that during Kushana rule in India or even slightly earlier, a segment of Indo-Aryan people migrated into this valley. We are not sure who those Indo-Aryan immigrants were. They may have been the Licchavis, who took refuge in the foothills of the Himalayas after they were driven out of Vaisali, or other immigrants, such as the nomadic Ahiras or Abhiras known as Gopalas from Mathura, but the history of this period is, so far, unknown.

Early writers on the history of Nepal most often used source material from the *vamsavalis*, the traditional chronicles of Nepalese kings, written from the 14th century onwards. According to these records several dynasties such as the Gopalas and the Kiratas preceded the Licchavis. Thus on the one hand, *Gopala Vamsavali* mentions a long list of thirty-two generations of Kirata kings who ruled the valley; on the other, the inscription of Jayadeva from Pasupatinath temple precinct, dated A.D. 733 gives some other details. According to this, the name of Supuspa, who was supposed to have succeeded twelve Licchavi kings, is said to have been followed by twenty-three Licchavi kings. Then the name of Jayadeva I is mentioned who in turn was followed by twelve more Licchavi kings. Finally, comes the name of Vrisadeva, who was already mentioned in the inscription of Manadeva in A.D.464 from the temple of Changu Narayana. In view of the long list of Licchavi kings and also because of colourful and poetic descriptions, the inscription may be considered an eponym of the Licchavi dynasty to which Jayadeva belonged. The authenticity of this statement is very doubtful for there is no archaeological evidence, nor is there any reference to this long ruling Licchavi dynasty in the annals of ancient Indian history. The long genealogical table in this inscription therefore, is neither reliable nor very helpful.

However, there is some circumstantial evidence from which we can draw the conclusion that Nepal had close contact with Kushana tradition and culture. Before the rise of Manadeva (A.D. 464), Kushana coins were in circulation in ancient Nepal. Not a single Licchavi coin before the reign of Manadeva has ever been found. According to one scholar, Kushana currency was used until the time of Amsuvarman in the 7th century A.D.[1] The discovery of a few Kushana coins in Kathmandu valley itself and also twenty-two hundred ancient coins mostly Kushana, recently discovered at Tilaurakot, provide further evidence of this. Furthermore, the Licchavis did not use the Gupta era but adopted the Saka era beginning with A.D. 78, which was continuously used for a few centuries. All this reflects the positive influence of the Kushanas.

Very recent discoveries in the Kathmandu valley include a number of ancient sculptures belonging to the early centuries of the Christian era. The style, modelling and iconographic features of these early sculptures are surprisingly similar to the Mathura-Kushana art of India which flourished from the 1st to the 3rd centuries A.D. This leads us to surmise that unless there was direct communication between the people of the valley and the Gangetic plains of northern India during the Kushana period no such art form could have existed in this relatively secluded valley of Nepal. No other explanation could possibly be given for the occurrence of those early iconographical forms of Kushana art found among the early sculptures of the Kathmandu valley.

When trade and cultural contacts were established between Nepal and the Gangetic plain, the traders, pilgrims and priests visited the valley. Artists were also invited to make copies of images from the Gangetic plains, especially from the Mathura region which was a great centre of Indian art.

It must be borne in mind that in the early days, the valley was dotted with small villages. Only hill-tops and patches of land were cleared for settlement and agriculture, because Licchavi inscriptions refer only to *grama* (village) and *dranga* (cluster of villages). The word *pura* (town) never occurred in early inscriptions.

The Indo-Aryan immigrants were obviously the first people to introduce the Aryan culture as well as Brahmanical icons to the valley. For the first time, the ethnic or primitive elements were assimilated with the Brahmanical faith. The fusion of indigenous or tribal culture with the already established tradition of India gave birth to a new culture, a new civilization which has lasted for nearly two thousand years. In Indian art, too, such a synthesis took place between the higher religion and the folk religion which started in India about the 3rd century B.C. and was in full vogue about the beginning of the Christian era, as noted in the sculptures of the Sunga Satavahana and Kushana periods. The earliest

[1] Pratapaditya Pal, *The Arts of Nepal, Part I, Sculpture*, Leiden, E.L. Brill, 1974, p. 62.

sculptures found in the Kathmandu valley represent a similar synthesis.

For our own study, let us once again summarize the early history of Nepal. Beginning from the 1st century to the 4th century A.D., this history was once impossible to trace for lack of historical or archaeological evidence. It must now be emphasised that comprehensive research on the early icons of the valley has led to the discovery of a number of ancient sculptures not discussed or known before and, as already referred to, these icons are assignable from the 1st to the 4th centuries A.D. This archaeological evidence strongly suggests that Indo-Aryan people were already living in the valley of Kathmandu as early as the 1st century A.D. Those Indo-Aryans who first migrated here from the Gangetic plains had already developed a higher level of culture. Obviously they were responsible for propagating Brahmanical culture in the valley; just who these people were is a matter of controversy.

Whoever the Indo-Aryan people might have been, they migrated into the valley after crossing the Siwalik range, and found the basin of the Kathmandu valley a rich and fertile land. Even at that time, the valley was dotted with tiny villages and inhabited by a small segment of indigenous non-Aryan tribes. As already mentioned, not only the Licchavis but also the ancient tribes such as the Sakyas, Mallas and Koliyas seem to have come here, for their names frequently occur in the Licchavi inscriptions. Evidently, like the Licchavis, they also belonged to the same old tribes of the Vijjian republic of the 6th century B.C. When driven out of their homelands, these ancient tribes, through fear of vengeance or persecution, took refuge in the hills. In fact, their original homelands were within the fringe of the Himalayas—the border land of present day Nepal. These tribes seem to have led a pastoral life and lived several centuries before they began to move towards the north and migrate beyond the Mahabharata Lekh.

It must also be noted here that among the ancient people who came to Nepal were the Abhiras. The Licchavi inscriptions show that the Abhiras (Guptas) occupied high positions in the administrative hierarchy from the very beginning and at one peroid, political power was seized by the feudal Guptas. In fact, one Vishnu Gupta became *de facto* ruler in the 7th century A.D., while the puppet Licchavi king, Bhimarjuna Deva, sat on the throne.

Besides the Abhiras, there were also the Varmans (Kshatriyas) who settled early on in the valley, and their names are found in ancient Licchavi inscriptions. The end of the 6th century and the early 7th century A.D. saw the rise of a Thakuri prince named Amsuvarman. He wielded power and rose to become a great feudal baron who ruled for nearly twenty-seven years. During this period the Licchavi king, Siva Deva, was only a nominal figure.

The above accounts show that the valley of Kathmandu had become the homeland of many ancient tribes. From this evidence, we may infer that the Licchavis might have migrated as early as the 1st century A.D. followed by other ancient tribes, such as the Sakyas, who presumably fled to the north-eastern hills from Kapilavastu, the Tarai region of present Nepal.

Among these ancient tribes, the Licchavis seem to have gained supremacy over the original inhabitants of the valley as well as other Indo-Aryan people from the south. At the outset, they may have ruled as tribal heads or created a small principality and established themselves as feudal lords. However, it is difficult to say when they founded the lineage of the Licchavi dynasty. The Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta refers to the Licchavis of Nepal as early as the middle of the 4th century A.D.

It is also highly probable that the Abhiras of the Mathura region came here very early. The Abhiras, whose origin is obscure, were known to be of nomadic character, and were said to be cowherds—*gopalas*. Though not historically reliable, the *vamsavalis*, too, refer to the *gopalas* who were supposed to be the earliest people to settle in the valley. It is likely that the Abhiras were among the earliest immigrants who led a pastoral life and propagated the Indo-Aryan religion and even brought artists from their homeland, Mathura, to carve images for worship. They were instrumental in disseminating within the valley, Brahmanical culture and art. Obviously this art was dominated by the Mathura school of the Kushana period. It is no wonder, then, that all the early sculptures of the valley are so closely related to the Mathura-Kushana tradition!

Our research has fully established the fact that a number of ancient divinities were introduced from the early centuries of the Christian era. The representation of Yaksha from Hadigaon, belonging to the 1st century A.D. (Pl.1), or the Gaja-Laksmi from Naihiti assignable to the 2nd century A.D. are among the earliest divinities in Nepal. This sculptural evidence is indisputable. It has been

archaeologically established that the sculptural art of Nepal goes back to the 1st century A.D.; it is also true that there was a close contact of cultural activities between the Gangetic plain of India and the valley of Nepal.

A comprehensive study of the early images of the valley shows that the end of the 4th century is marked by a change of style in iconography and sculptural form. With the rise of the Licchavi dynasty (*ca.* A.D. 400), the early sculptures underwent a distinct transformation. Motifs and features which are found in the early sculptures gradually disappeared. They were replaced by stylized or sophisticated forms. By the time Manadeva ascended the throne, there was already a well established art form that can be seen in the two reliefs of Vishnu-Vikranta, both dated A.D. 467 (Pls. 155,156), which he consecrated in the name of his mother, Rajyavati. From this period onwards, a new tradition, known as Licchavi art, began to flourish and continued to do so till the end of the 8th century A.D.

The art of the Licchavi period is known for its quintessential quality. The forms and traits are strongly influenced by the Gupta art of India, but the handling of the chisel and interpretation of expression are distinctly Nepalese. The artists of that period were able to produce some of the most dynamic portrayals of religious themes. This was the golden epoch in the history of Nepalese sculpture. Some of the best examples are to be seen in the sculptures of Kaliyadamana from Hanuman Dhoka, the Licchavi-chaitya from Dhokabahal and the Visvarupa from Changu Narayana (Pl. 140). Unlike the early sculptures, Licchavi sculptures are characterised by remarkable narrative friezes. It should be further noted that only from the 5th century onwards did Buddhist sculptures begin to appear in the valley. For the art historian it remains an enigma, in spite of the strong tradition, as to why Buddhist art did not appear before the 5th century A.D. as did Brahmanical icons.

Tradition speaks of Asoka's visit to the valley of Kathmandu. He is said to have founded the city of Patan and erected five stupas, although no documentary evidence, as such, survives. Asoka did, however, in the 3rd century B.C., visit Lumbini, in the Tarai area of Nepal where Buddha was born. There he erected an inscribed stone pillar to commemorate his visit to this holy site and the Asokan pillar still stands.

Equally apocryphal is the tradition that the town of Deo Patan was founded by Charumati, daughter of Asoka. She is said to have come to Nepal to preach Buddhism, but married a Kshatriya prince named Devapala and settled in Nepal. She ultimately set up a *vihara* (monastery) and spent the rest of her life there. The name Chabahil is said to be a corrupt form of Charumati Vihara—a Buddhist establishment that exists to this day. Despite the claim that Buddhism was introduced as early as the 3rd century B.C. no sculptural evidence to establish the antiquity of Buddhist art in Nepal has so far been found. However, a large number of *viharas* are mentioned in the Licchavi inscriptions: Srimana-Vihara, Sriraja-Vihara, Guma-Vihara, Kharjurika-Vihara, etc. In his Pasupati inscription Jayadeva II refers to his great-grandfather Vrisadeva as *sugata sasana pakshapati*, which indicates that Vrisadeva was inclined towards Buddhism. But it is difficult to understand why Buddhist sculpture belonging to the early centuries of the Christian era has never come to light in Kathmandu.

The Licchavis were succeeded by the Thakuris, a dynasty which ruled until the end of the 12th century. It is said that the Newari era known as Nepal Samvat (A.D. 880) was founded by Raghavadeva. Among the Thakuri kings, Gunakamadeva, who ruled exceptionally long (sixty-six years), is said to have founded the city of Kathmandu. It was during his reign that major construction of temples and monasteries took place.

In the art of the Thakuri period, one can still trace the style and norm of the Licchavis. The artists were later stimulated by the Pala school of eastern India. As a result, a great deal of stone as well as metal sculpture was consecrated to the Buddhist pantheon. Nonetheless, some of the finest works of art on Brahmanical themes were also produced, such as the Uma-Mahesvara panels and images of standing Vishnu, flanked by Sri-Laksmi and Garuda. But the most noteworthy achievements were the illustrated manuscripts of this period of which a large number still survive. As dated stone inscriptions of this period are rare, the names of the Thakuri kings can be traced mainly from the colophons of manuscripts.

Because of the decline of Buddhism in India in the early medieval period and the increasing Muslim invasions from the west, a number of priests and monks from India, especially from the great Buddhist establishments such as Nalanda and Vikramshila, took shelter in Nepal. The art of the later Thakuri period displays a new dimension which is characterised by the elongation of the body and somewhat rigid form. Such examples are found in a number of sculptures including that of the Surya image,

dated A.D. 1083 from Saugal, Patan, and the Hari-Hara image from Kumbhesvara Dhara.

After the fall of the Thakuris, the Malla dynasty was founded in A.D. 1200 and lasted for over five hundred years. The history of the Mallas may be classified broadly in two periods: the undivided Malla kingdom (A.D. 1200 to 1480), and the divided Malla kingdom (A.D. 1481 to 1780). By A.D. 1780 the entire valley had been conquered by Prithvi Narayan Shah, ushering in the Shah dynasty which has lasted to this day.

Generally speaking, the art of the Malla period is marked by the growing popularity of the Vajrayana and Tantrayana cults. The mystic cult of Tantrism took firm root in the religious society of those days. This stimulated a new dimension in the sculptural art of Nepal by producing various gods and goddesses with multiple heads and arms. The art of the late Malla period is characterised by heavy ornamentation and a sharp tilt of the body.

Religious activities developed to a very high degree. In the history of Nepal this period is marked by a very rich cultural heritage of the Newari community. For the first time, both the Hindu and Buddhist communities participated in rites and rituals without any sectarian bias. This religious tolerance is today one of the most remarkable features of Nepalese culture.

Trade with neighbouring countries was fully established and it was during this period that a number of Nepalese artists, including Aniko, who later achieved great fame at the imperial court of Kublai Khan, went to Tibet to decorate the newly built monasteries with metal sculptures and wall paintings. Obviously, the art of Tibet was greatly influenced by mystic art from Nepal.

With regard to the sculptural art of the Shah period, almost the same traits and traditions were followed that prevailed in the late Malla period. Though the ancient styles and iconography have changed considerably with the passage of time, for centuries the Newari artists of Nepal were able to maintain the traditions of their artistic richness remarkably well.

To establish the date and style of a particular sculpture is extremely difficult, because all ancient sculpture of Nepal, like that of other eastern countries, is religious in character. Thus the same religious themes and traits were represented for centuries. Keeping this in mind, we have repeatedly visited the old sites, temples, shrines and water-spouts where ancient images are found and have examined every piece very carefully. During our research, we have come across some peculiar iconographical enigmas not to be found even in Indian art. This has led some writers to make wild speculations and they have dated very late sculptures to an early century or some early sculptures as works of a later period. In the absence of dated material, such pitfalls are likely to occur.

The discovery of the first ancient sculptures of the valley took place less than three decades ago. Until then there was almost nothing that could safely be ascribed to the early centuries of the Christian era. Although previous writers indicated the possibility of much older sculpture than was conceived by citing an example of a Yaksha or Yaksha Bodhisattva image now preserved in the National Museum, Kathmandu (Pl. 1), no one had attempted to bridge the gap between the Yaksha image, datable to the 1st century A.D., and the earliest dated reliefs of Vishnu-Vikranta of A.D. 467 (Pls.155, 156).

Now with new material and ample evidence at hand, it may unhesitatingly be said that the history of Nepalese scuplture goes back at least two thousand years. For the first time, these new materials have been carefully examined through the perspective of a native eye. While evaluating them, care has been taken to avoid false national sentiment, for there is no greater truth than the work of art itself.

Yaksha

One ancient Nepalese sculpture is the recently discovered image of a headless Yaksha, found at Hadigaon, now preserved in the National Museum, Kathmandu (Pl. 1). Before we attempt to date and properly identify this image, it will be worthwhile to first discuss the iconographic features of early Yaksha images in India. This will not only give us an idea of the evolution of the early art form in India but also a clear picture of Yaksha images and the Yaksha cult which prevailed widely in ancient India as well as in Nepal.

A close study of early Indian sculpture shows that the earliest icons of India were those of Yakshas, which preceded Brahmanical and Buddhist art so far as the anthropomorphic image is concerned. Yaksha images have been found over a large area extending from western India to Orissa in the east. They are marked by their distinct style and norm based on folk tradition and characterised by a monumental size and grandeur.

Scholars such as A.K. Coomaraswamy and V.S. Agrawala have collected a mass of data and produced ample evidence to prove the origin of these Yaksha icons. Agrawala has classified these images "as the earliest Indian statuary consisting of a group of free standing, huge figures (more than life size) installed under any protective shed or the open sky, carved in the round but still conceived frontally."[1]

Though contemporaneous, these images are different from Mauryan art of the 3rd century B.C. The modelling and treatment to be seen in Mauryan art, particularly the polish on the cream-coloured *chunar* stone as smooth as a mirror, reveal a climax in technical achievement. Mauryan craftsmen might have learned the technique from the Achaemenian art of Iran.

In contrast, we find the carving and modelling of early Yaksha images far simpler and coarser than sophisticated Mauryan art which must have originated from the native style. With the exception of the two Yaksha images from Pataliputra (modern Patna), the ancient capital of the Mauryan empire, Yakshas elsewhere seem to be based on a folk cult which was deeply rooted among the primitive people. This indigenous cult was in vogue for several centuries preceding the Christian era.

For our own study, a comparison may be drawn here between the Yakshi from Didargunj, near Patna, now housed in the Patna Museum, and the primitive unifacial Yakshi from Besnagar, Madhya Pradesh, now preserved in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. The Didargunj Yakshi is richly treated and modelled, with traces of lustrous polish, indicating the influence of Mauryan art. The modelling of the face is highly sophisticated. In contrast, the Besnagar Yakshi appears to be based purely on folk art. For example, the treatment of her garment, ornaments and hairdo is coarse. The stance is rigid and the modelling, rather heavy; in this image, the simplicity of the native style and gentleness of the folk tradition are apparent as though such a type of image could belong only to village folk.

In ancient times huge Yaksha images, in anthropomorphic form, were installed in open fields to be worshipped by local tribes. The *Rigveda* specially mentions the beautiful figure of Yaksha and

[1] V.S. Agrawala, *Indian Art*, Varanasi, Prithivi Prakashan, 1965, p.111.

calls him *adbhuta* (miraculous) and *chitra* (wondrous). The *Yajurveda* refers to him as *apurva* Yaksha (mysterious Yaksha) and the *Atharvaveda* as *mahad* Yaksha (mighty Yaksha). He is also quoted in the *Mahabharata* as *mahakaya* (with a huge body). In the epic he is described as having a huge body like a palm tree, as high as a mountain and with great strength.

There is a distinct plastic form shown in the Yaksha images which must be regarded "as the grand ancestors of all Indian statuary."[1] In the words of Agrawala, "A conspicuous turban on the head, a flat torque round the neck, a triangular necklace on the breast, armlets round the arms, bracelets on the wrists, a scarf thrown over the shoulder, and a dhoti on the legs secured by a tied belt, of the two arms the right one lifted and the left suspended—this is the form of the Yaksha statues."[2]

Among the Yaksha images, the most outstanding is the Parkham Yaksha, also known as Manibhadra Yaksha, datable to the 3rd century B.C. from Mathura Museum (Pl. 4). Another noteworthy Yaksha image of a gigantic size (over 10 ft high) was recently discovered at the confluence of the rivers Bes and Vetravati at Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh, India. Its modelling shows a native style and gives the impression of being of primitive origin. On stylistic grounds, it appears older than the Parkham Yaksha mentioned above. The Yaksha is holding a flask of immortal drinks in his left hand. This iconic feature was later adopted as a model for the Bodhisattva and Vishnu images. This proves that Yaksha images were carved before Brahmanical and Buddhist gods and goddesses were represented in human form.

Enough has been said about the antiquity of Yaksha images. It is, however, interesting to note that in the course of time, the Yakshas were degraded in rank and later mingled with the tutelary deities. At one time, the Yakshas were held in the highest esteem as supreme deities and compared with Aryan gods such as Indra, Mitra and Varuna. Yakshas are frequently mentioned in the *Rigveda, Yajurveda, Atharvaveda, Upanishads, Mahabharata, Grihasutra*, and the *Jatakas*. However, we know from literary evidence that the Aryans who lived in association with the Austric tribes did not fully approve of the worship of Yaksha, which practise belonged to Austric tribes. The Aryans did not place this non-Aryan deity above their own. In one *mantra* (*Rv.* 4.3.13) a prayer is addressed to Agni, "Go never to the feast of one who harms us, the treacherous neighbour or unworthy kinsman."[3] Here, the words "neighbour" and "kinsman" stand for a member of an Austric tribe. The Aryans did not look with sympathetic eyes upon people who accepted the cult of Yaksha. In other words, they kept aloof from Yaksha worship. This suggests that Yaksha was a tutelary god of the non-Aryan or primitive people.

Thus, in later periods Aryan gods gained ascendency and the Yakshas gradually receded into the background and were relegated to a subordinate position. When combined with the lower tutelary deities, Yakshas "began to be regarded as goblins living on human flesh and propitiated by bloody sacrifices."[4]

It is clear from the above accounts that the Yaksha cult was deeply rooted among the primitive people, and images of Yaksha and Yakshi were worshipped as part of the folk cults prevalent in ancient India. Actually, Yaksha shrines are still found in Indian villages under different names. The presentation of new-born babies to the village god was a common practice among ancient people and is so even to this day. Primitive people had great veneration for goblins, genii, spirits and powerful tutelary deities.

Recently, a very interesting image of a Yaksha was discovered from Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.[5] The figure is shown standing on a decorative pedestal with his feet slightly apart. His right hand is raised in *abhayamudra*, while his left hand is holding a child. Judging from the style and modelling, the sculpture seems to be a work of the Sunga period. This example indicates that the cult of Yaksha was well known not only in India, but also in neighbouring countries.

It is no surprise, then, that the tradition of worshipping the Yaksha prevailed even in this mountain-girt valley of Nepal. The image of Yaksha discovered recently in Kathmandu valley is stylistically very close to the Indian Yakshas discussed above. The sculptural evidence shows without doubt that this indigenous folk cult flourished in the valley as early as the 1st century A.D. This is the most reasonable view we can form on the basis of comparison with Yaksha images of India.

[1] V.S. Agrawala, *Ancient Indian Folk Cults*, Varanasi, Prithivi Prakashan, 1970, p. 183.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 183.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 169.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 166, 167.
[5] A.D. Perera, "Yatala Vihara—Site of Pre-Historic Yaksha Shrine", Sri Lanka, *World Buddhism*, vol. XXV, June 1977.

The headless Yaksha figure was found in the early Sixties at Hadigaon (Pl. 1). When first discovered, the sculpture was just lying in a ditch by the side of a road.[1] The children used to throw stones at it believing it to be a headless *murkutta* or *khya*, a local village goblin noted for its evil propensities. This unique torso was then removed to the National Museum, Kathmandu, and was displayed for some months in the open air compound of the Museum. Finally, in the mid-Sixties, the torso was installed permanently at the National Museum.

The area of Hadigaon where the torso was discovered was the site of an ancient settlement and has yielded not only a number of Licchavi inscriptions but also numerous ancient sculptures which will be discussed in subsequent chapters. This sandstone torso of Yaksha is the earliest image hitherto found in the valley of Kathmandu. The figure is standing firmly erect in *samabhanga* with the feet apart, as do the early Indian Yakshas. The head, arms, feet and other relevant attributes are all missing, making it more difficult for close study and proper identification. The hips look a bit slender but the sturdy build shows broad massive shoulders and a heavy chest. The figure is wearing a diaphanous dhoti, revealing fleshy but strong thighs. The frontal folds of the garment flow down between the thighs and legs. A girdle, which holds the dhoti, is tied into a knot with the fillets hanging on the right side of the central folds. This is a feature common to the early Indian Yaksha, as for example, in the Yaksha statue from Parkham village in Mathura (Pl. 4) belonging to the 3rd century B.C. and one of the earliest known stone sculptures in India. On the Parkham Yaksha, the dhoti is fastened by a girdle round the waist and the two loose ends of the girdle hang from the knot between the thighs.

The Yaksha figure of Hadigaon (Pl.1) is wearing an *ekamsika uttariya* on the left shoulder, the gathered folds of which fall gracefully on its left, probably reaching down to the ankle, whereas part of the folds may have been held by the clenched left hand as in the standing Bodhisattvas from Sarnath and Patna. Indeed, the left hand held akimbo is similar to the style of the Mathura school, but the rendering of the lower garment in our Yaksha completely differs from the Bodhisattva type.

It wears a broad necklace, the frontal details of which are badly worn. However, on the back of the neck it is tied by a fillet and its two ends dangle artistically from the loose plaited knot, reminiscent of the Yaksha of Baroda (Fig.1). This type of broad *hara* (necklace), either oblong or V shaped, is frequently found on Yaksha or Yakshi images. However, it is not entirely absent in Bodhisattva figures.

The back of the torso is more carefully carved and elaborately designed than the front, although the treatment is in low relief (Pl. 3). Nevertheless, the sensitive modelling of the *uttariya* over the left shoulder as an *ekamsika* falling across the back, the four-fold plaited dhoti dangling between the thighs, and the criss-cross design of the girdle have a close similarity with the figures of Rajpurusa and also the headless Yaksha of Pratapgarh (Figs. 2,6). Although it has certain characteristics of the Bodhisattva tradition, it must be remembered that the frontal garment around the thighs is practically diaphanous in our figure, whereas in the Bodhisattva of Sarnath (Fig.3) the folds are allowed to fall diagonally from the clenched left hand to the right, indicated by incised grooves. It is interesting to note that like the early Yaksha figures of India, our Yaksha from Hadigaon is slightly pot-bellied (Pl.2).

The modelling of the back has a close stylistic affinity with the tradition of early Yaksha figures of India (Figs. 2,5,6). The treatment of the lower garment, the modelling of the buttocks, the *kanthahara* (necklace) and its loose hanging fillets are also strongly reminiscent of Yaksha sculpture of India and it is therefore more likely to represent a Yaksha than a Bodhisattva.

Here, again unlike the Bodhisattva of Patna (Fig.4) on which the additional sash is looped across the thighs common to the Bodhisattva tradition of the Mathura type, such a sash is absent in our figure. This factor also emphasises the antiquity of the Yaksha tradition. Judging from the modelling and style of the sculpture it appears to be the work of an artist who was well acquainted with the Yaksha tradition of India. He must have been one who joined the early Indo-Aryan immigrants, or he may have been invited for the propagation of religion. Otherwise how could such an art form exist without any art tradition at that remote date? There is no other explanation to account for its presence in the valley of Kathmandu.

This sculpture has recently been brought to the notice of scholars but controversy arises

[1] Rameshjung Thapa, *Nepali Murtikala* (Nepalese Sculpture), *Ramjham*, V.S. 2027, vol. 6, no. 3, October 1970, Kathmandu.

with regard to its identification and date. N.R. Banerjee and B.K. Rijal have identified it as Yaksha Bodhisattva,[1] whereas Pal has identified it as a Bodhisattva and assigned it to the 2nd-3rd centuries A.D.[2] On the other hand, Krishna Deva has assigned it to the 1st century A.D.[3] and identified it as a Yaksha. This is more likely, for the cults of Yaksha, Naga and Mother Goddess were very popular among the earliest people of India as well as Nepal. Though the two writers mentioned above identified the image from Hadigaon as Bodhisattva, our research on the ancient icons of the valley has established that there is not a single Buddhist image in the valley of Kathmandu that can be assigned to the early centuries of the Christian era. Only from the 5th century onwards are images of Buddha, followed by those of Avalokitesvara, found. This is strange. One finds it difficult to assign any cause for the absence of Buddhist images of an earlier date. In contrast, numerous images representing Brahmanical gods and goddesses, assignable to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries A.D. have been discovered. These images will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters under different headings. On the absence of early Buddhist images in the valley of Kathmandu one can only surmise that either Buddhism was not introduced during the early centuries of the Christian era or the religion itself was limited to the symbolic worship of stupas.

Furthermore, if the headless sculpture found at Hadigaon were that of Bodhisattva, as hinted by some scholars, many more Buddhist images would have come to light from the 1st to the 4th centuries A.D., as we find in Indian art, but none whatsoever have been found. On this basis, too, it is more reasonable to identify this image as Yaksha, for the Yaksha image of Hadigaon is not only massive, burly and monumental like those in India, but also the largest and oldest among the free standing images in Nepal. Therefore, on the basis of style and iconography we can identify this image as Yaksha and assign it to the 1st century A.D.

[1] N.R. Banerjee and B.K. Rijal, "Three Early Sculptures in Stone from the National Museum," *Ancient Nepal*, Journal of the Department of Archaeology, no. 4, July 1968, Kathmandu.
[2] P. Pal, *op. cit.*, pp. 40, 41.
[3] Krishna Deva, *Buddhist Art and Architecture in India and Nepal*, vol. XI, no. 3, 1974, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok.

The Divine Mother

As in India, the cult of the Mother Goddess seems to have been quite popular in Nepal from very early times. Before discussing the subject of the mother cult in Nepal, however, it would be worthwhile to look at the origins of this widespread practice which was prevalent not only in India and Nepal but also in the Mediterranean region, Europe and ancient Central Asia.

The discovery of numerous terracotta figurines in Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, almost five millennia old, symbolizing the great Mother Goddess, obviously indicates the popularity of Mother worship. She was regarded as the Divine Mother and as a protectress. These terracotta figurines throw some light on the ancient beliefs and conventions of the time. Judging from the pattern of such terracottas found in the Indus Valley, it appears that they were not mere toys for children or decorative objects but household deities, regularly worshipped as the Mother Goddess with votive offerings. The terracotta figurines found in ancient Egyptian graves signify their old belief in the continuity of life after death. In ancient Babylon, also, it is said that female terracotta figurines were buried under the floors of houses to drive away the evil spirit. This indicates that the origin of the mother cult is practically ageless and that she has been worshipped under different names from the dawn of civilization.

The terracotta figurines of Mohenjo-daro (Figs. 7, 8, 9, 10) are heavily adorned and bedecked with jewellery. Their broad hips and prominent breasts are a typical representation symbolizing generative power, fertility and maternity.

It will not be an exaggeration to say that the worship of the pre-Aryan Mother Goddess, which was overwhelmingly popular in the Indus Valley, later influenced the rise of the mother cult among the Aryans in the Gangetic plain and served as the prototype of the Universal Goddess Sri, Sri-Ma, Aditi, Prithvi, Sri-Laksmi and Gaja-Laksmi.

The earliest Indo-Aryan Mother Goddesses are to be found in the ring-stones which were worshipped as Sri-Chakra dating back to the 3rd century B.C. The worship of Sri-Chakra was indeed widely prevalent from the Peshawar Valley to Pataliputra in Bihar. In such ring-stones discovered from Taxila, Kausambi, Mathura, Rajghat (old Varanasi), Rupar and Bashar (Vaisali), the nude Mother Goddesses are carved in various forms, mostly in geometrical patterns. The goddess is usually depicted in full figure, standing stiffly with large circular earrings, firm breasts, heavy and large broad hips with two straight arms dangling on either side (Figs. 12, 13). She is flanked by animals or palm trees with birds and sometimes with solar symbols. In Lauriya Nandangarh, chiefly known for its Asokan pillar, a figure of the Mother Goddess, in gold plaque repousse, assignable to the 4th century B.C., was found. The goddess is shown standing stiffly in the characteristic manner of the Mother Goddess (Fig. 11). The representation of the Mother Goddess in ring-stones, however, remained limited, with a stiff pose and splayed feet. John Marshall has clearly pointed out the meaning of the Mother Goddess depicted in those ring-stones: "The nude figures engraved on them appear to represent a goddess of fertility, perhaps the Earth Goddess, Prithvi, and they point to the disc having served as votive offering. The earth itself, it may be recalled, was conceived as 'wheel-shaped' in the *Rigveda*, and is said to be 'circular' in the *Satapatha Brahmana*. With these may be

compared a seal from Harappa exhibiting the Goddess of Fertility with her legs wide apart, but portrayed upside down, with a plant issuing from her womb. These figures of the Fertility Goddess are particularly significant, because the form of the ring-stones from Taxila and Kosam also call to mind the particular ring-stones from Harappa and Mohenjo-daro."[1]

She was, indeed, the great Mother Goddess of mysterious power. She was held in high esteem by primitive people. Her worship was a prominent feature and prevalent throughout the religious history of India and Nepal. Even today in some remote areas of Bastar district in Madhya Pradesh, India, where tribals live in complete isolation, almost every door is decorated with the figure of the Mother Goddess of ancient tradition.

In this context, reference must be made to the goddess Kottavati of South India. She was an ancient goddess and, like Hariti, was originally an ogress. She was very popular among the aboriginal people and her worship was widespread throughout the south in ancient times. She was also identified as the great Goddess of Vindhyachal and later was associated with Ambika, Chandika, Chamunda and the paramount goddess Durga or Mahisamardini. The popularity of this goddess, who was worshipped under different names, indeed throws an interesting light on the history of ancient folk cults. V.S. Agrawala has rightly observed, "This is a well known phenomenon of religious history that different beliefs came together in a free and unrestricted exchange of ideas and forms which also find expression in iconographic formulas and sculptures. A minute scrutiny of Kushana statuettes at Mathura provides a tangible commentary on the different stages of this assimilative approach. Folk beliefs do not die out but mingle in the fertile soil of the human mind depositing their seeds for new germinations and creating a leaven in which the old and new shake hands together, and the new and fresh skein of cults gets twisted together with common approval."[2]

He has further discussed the subject on literary evidence which is, indeed, the most valuable of sources: "It is obvious that all the tutelary goblins that were of an awful nature were assimilated in the cult of Skanda sometime during the Kushana period. Similarly, all the dreadful female spirits who were worshipped as *matrikas*, came to be regarded as a part of the Skanda cult, sometimes as his mothers, as stated by Skanda himself: 'O ye Mothers, I am your son. Now you occupy a place beyond reproach.' In another context it is stated that they were reconciled with Shashthi or Revati and described as the female consort of Skanda. It has been explicitly stated about the *matrikas* that they made a self-confession to Skanda describing themselves as the mothers of all the people."[3] This account shows that the *matrikas* are associated with Skanda and they all belong to the same family group. The *Mahabharata* provides a detailed picture of the Skanda cult and its association with various Mother Goddesses.

It should also be remembered that the goddess Shashthi was equally popular as the guardian deity of child-birth and of pregnant mothers. This goddess was believed to be identified with Revati. In the *Kasyapasamhita*, a whole chapter devoted to Revati Kalpa, includes names of goddesses worshipped during the Kushana and early Gupta period. This unparalleled record shows that Revati, Shashthi and Jataharini, also known as Hariti, the presiding deity of children, belong to the same pantheon and were worshipped with the same ardent zeal.

We are told in the *Aranyakaparva* of the *Mahabharata*, that "Skanda became united with the goddess Sri on the fifth bright day of the month of Magha which therefore became known as the *Sri-Panchami* day. On the next day Skanda found his consummation with the goddess Sri and therefore that day (*tithi*) became famous as *Shashthi*."[4]

We know from literature that the goddess Shashthi was closely associated with Skanda who is represented with six heads as the son of six Krittika mothers.

In Nepal, so far as inscriptional evidence is concerned, the names of the two goddesses, Sri-Devi (Sridevya) and Shashthi (Shashthidevyakula) are found in the Hadigaon inscription of Amsuvarman, A.D. 636.[5] This proves that goddess Shashthi was worshipped at the royal palace of Kailashakuta-bhavana.

[1] J. Marshall, *Annual Report*, Archaeological Survey of India, 1927-28, p. 96.
[2] V.S. Agrawala, *op. cit.*, pp. 90, 91.
[3] *Ibid.*, 89.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 90.
[5] D.B. Vajracharya, *Licchavikalka Abhilekha*, (Inscriptions of Licchavi Period), Kathmandu, Institution of Nepal and Asian Studies, V.S. 2030, pp. 301-304.

It must also be observed that the ancient goddess Jyeshtha who is worshipped on the sixth day after the birth of a child, was the same goddess as Shashthi. Sometimes she is called Skanda-mata.

During the Kushana period, the worship of Mother Goddesses became very popular. Several statuettes belonging to the Kushana period in Mathura have been discovered in which Mother Goddesses are shown grouped together either with Kubera or with Skanda. These themes seem to have been quite familiar to the Mathura sculptors. But the peculiar characteristic of Kushana art was the representation of Mothers not only with human faces but also with bird-like or animal-like faces, sometimes carrying children or holding a flask of wine in their left hands. In some cases Laksmi and her child with Kubera, or sometimes Laksmi, Hariti and Kubera together are represented (Pl. 58). One may observe that in the early art of Mathura there was a considerable overlap of forms among the divinities of various denominations.

Thus it appears that the earliest iconographic representations of Mother Goddesses as well as of other Hindu deities were first conceived by the sculptors of Mathura during the Kushana period. The workshops of Mathura were very active and brought about a great revolution in Indian art. The Mathura artists synthesised the spirit of folk cults and the cults of higher religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. It must be remembered that no scupltor, however great, can perfect the religious icon without meditation and divine intuition. Only through *dhyana* (meditation), and "having produced in the mind, the artist proceeds to production of the concrete or visual symbolism as the various forms of art".[1] Thus for the first time during the Kushana period, we come across various forms and iconographies of the Brahmanical gods and goddesses such as Vishnu, Surya, Karttikeya, Indra, Siva, Naga, Brahma, Skanda, Laksmi, Durga and Saptamatrika, along with innumerable Jain and Buddhist images.

[1] V.S. Agrawala, *Studies in Indian Art*, Varanasi, Viswavidyalaya Prakashan, 1965, p. 25.

Gaja-Laksmi and Sri-Laksmi

In the previous chapter, we have described how the Indo-Aryan Mother Goddesses found on ring-stones were later associated with and identified as Sri-Devi, Sri-Ma, Sri-Laksmi, the supreme universal deity and spouse of Vishnu—Vishnu-Patni, the goddess of wealth. A lotus became her symbol and main attribute. As a very popular deity she became the goddess par excellence. She was represented either sitting or standing on a lotus as *padmesthita* (Figs. 14, 15, 16).[1] The goddess was regarded as born from water, the symbol of fertility and abundance. She was the giver of wealth and food, and thus she became the goddess of prosperity to her devotees. This ancient goddess Sri and Sri-Laksmi, the dual deity, later formed into a single evolving cult of Sri-Laksmi. The goddess was shown holding a lotus in one or both hands.

In the Bharhut sculpture, goddess Laksmi is represented under the name of Sirima Devata. Images of Sri-Laksmi are frequently found in Sunga or early Mathura art. From the 2nd or early 1st century B.C. the representation of the goddess in the *abhiseka* or Gaja-Laksmi type seems to have been very popular, as it frequently occurs on seals, coins and stone reliefs. This is the most interesting representation of the goddess, showing two elephants on each side, pouring water over her head from two inverted jars held in their trunks.

One of the earliest examples of Gaja-Laksmi in Indian art can be cited here for comparative study. In the fragment of a *torana* architrave from Kausambi, now preserved in the Allahabad Museum (Pl. 6) and datable to the 1st century B.C., the goddess Gaja-Laksmi stands on a large lotus with her right hand raised in *abhayamudra* and her clenched left hand placed on her hip. From the lotus on which the goddess stands issue three stalks of lotus on each side. The tallest stalks have a bell-shaped lotus on which stand two small elephants bathing the goddess with water from long-necked jars.[2]

The lower garment of the goddess is diaphanous and is secured by a girdle of a single beaded string. She is wearing heavy earrings, a necklace consisting of a single strand of large beads falling between the breasts, coiled bracelets and large heavy anklets. The tallest pair of stalks which seem to have bell-shaped lotuses are not actually lotus flowers but lotus seed-pods with flat tops whereon stand the elephants. In the author's experience such lotus seed-pods are seldom found in Indian art.

An image of the goddess Gaja-Laksmi, having an almost identical form and iconography as discussed above, is to be found at Naihiti (Chyasaltol) in Patan (Pl. 7). This is the earliest sculpture of Gaja-Laksmi in the valley of Kathmandu and was hitherto undiscussed. Its discovery is undoubtedly significant, as it constitutes the first record of such a divinity in Nepal. Although one of the earliest and most important images of Nepal, it has never been properly identified nor has it been studied and discussed in print. Moreover, it may be the sole example of Gaja-Laksmi in the sculptural art of Nepal. No image of Gaja-Laksmi has ever been repeated in this form, either in the Licchavi or post-Licchavi periods, let alone in the

[1] V.S. Agrawala, *Indian Art*, *op. cit.*, p.81.

[2] Pramode Chandra, *Stone Sculpture in the Allahabad Museum*, Varanasi, American Institution of Indian Studies, 1970, p.58, pl. xxx.

art of the Malla period.

The goddess Gaja-Laksmi is standing in *samabhanga* pose with her feet apart. Massive anklets, similar to those of the female deities of the Kushana period (Pls. 8, 18, 54, 60), are conspicuously visible on her feet. Her earrings, too, are identical to those of Laksmi from Mathura Museum (Pl. 5). She is wearing a single-beaded necklace and a diaphanous garment, the central folds of which are gathered into a decorative fold as seen in the early sculptures of the valley. A three-fold sash falls diagonally from left to right making a U-turn on the left, a feature common to the early images of Mathura. Two mutilated figures, apparently devotees, are kneeling with folded hands on either side of her feet. The face of the goddess is partly broken and abraded. A full blown lotus which the goddess is holding in her left hand, is identical to that of Laksmi referred to above. Her right hand, as if raised in *abhayamudra*, holds a lotus bud. The breasts of the goddess are mutilated but a broad and heavy hip is conspicuous and, indeed, reminiscent of the Mother Goddess from Mohenjo-daro. (Figs. 7, 8, 9, 10.)

Like the Gaja-Laksmi from Allahabad Museum (Pl. 6) the Gaja-Laksmi from Naihiti, Patan (Pl. 7) has two long stalks of lotus on her sides, probably issuing from the lotus stem on which the goddess may be standing. On the two stalks two bell-shaped lotus seed-pods are depicted with two elephants lustrating the goddess with water pouring on her head. The shape of the seed-pods in both the images is strikingly identical. One wonders how the two figures could be so similar at that distant date!

Another striking feature is the similarity between our image of Gaja-Laksmi and the images of Laksmi or Gaja-Laksmi from Mathura Museum and Allahabad University Museum (Pls. 5, 6, 9). The modelling of the face, the earrings, the hairdo and, above all, the pattern of the lotuses which the goddesses are holding in their left hands, are remarkably similar. The only difference is that the goddess Laksmi from Mathura Museum (Pl. 5) is sitting in European fashion whereas our Gaja-Laksmi is standing in traditional manner. In other words, one who is not aware of the existence of Nepalese art in the early centuries of the Christian era may be led to assume that these two pieces of sculpture are from the same workshop!

A very special study must be made in regard to the distinctive hair-styles of the above mentioned images as both goddesses have similar hairdos. In both figures the tresses fall from the small central bun reaching up to the ears (Figs. 17, 18). The lateral tresses—short, round and curved—are shaped like sausages. This is the first time that such a unique hair-style is found in Nepalese art. In early art such a motif is rarely seen. If not exactly similar, a motif akin to this pattern is found in the sculptures of female divinities in early Mathura art. But, in most cases, this motif is shown as a canopy above the head and has led some scholars to identify it wrongly as a Naga hood. This kind of hair-style seems to have evolved mainly during the Mathura-Kushana period. However, in Nepal such a motif had been used from the early Christian era and continued up to the 4th century A.D. (Figs. 18-29). After that, it is totally absent. No such hair-style is found in Licchavi or post-Licchavi art. What does this signify? We shall discuss it shortly. On the basis of comparison we can assign this image to the 2nd century A.D.

We will now take an example of the ancient goddess Sri-Laksmi found in Nepal. The mutilated image of Sri-Laksmi (Pl. 11) was discovered in early 1976 at Hadigaon. This sculpture was lying in a most neglected condition among heaps of mutilated images of a later date on the stone steps under a large pipal tree. According to the local people, there were some remains of the foundation of an old temple nearby. A few years ago, when the narrow road was widened, all the remains were cleared, and now nothing is found except the pipal tree as witness to bygone days. This indicates that an old temple must have stood here, and in fact, there was a Narayana temple where the image of Sri-Laksmi might have been installed for worship. When found, the image was lying in a corner as an unidentified piece of sculpture.

Because of its badly mutilated condition, it was at first difficult to ascertain its age and identity. However, a close observation has revealed that it was none other than the stone image of goddess Sri-Laksmi, sitting on a large lotus. The head is completely missing; the breasts, hands and entire upper portion of the knees are also broken. Nevertheless, there are some unique features in this image. To my knowledge, this is the first time an image of Sri-Lakṣmi in a stone sculpture, based on ancient iconography and style, has ever come to light in the valley of Kathmandu.

However, an early terracotta figure of Sri-Laksmi or Padma-Sri, detable to the 1st century

B.C. has been discovered at the excavation of Tilaurakot in the Tarai region of Nepal (Pl. 10).[1] In the terracotta figure, the goddess is standing in *tribhanga* pose, cross-legged on a large full blown lotus springing from the *padmavana*.

Her slender body with a flat round face and her heavy bicornet headdress are typical features of the terracotta figurines of the Mother Goddess belonging to the Sunga period. Her right upraised hand may have been held in *varadamudra* or may have supported a lotus. This is not clear as the details are badly obliterated, but the left hand is resting on the hip, and at the same time holding the delicate stem of a lotus. The central *padma* on which the goddess is standing is flanked by lotuses springing from the fenced pond. The two perforations on the top for suspension indicate the regular worship of the goddess. The exaggeration of her heavy breasts and broad hips symbolises the maternal aspects which have affinities with her elder sister, the Mother Goddess of Mohenjo-daro.

A similar terracotta figurine of Sri-Laksmi was discovered from the ruins of ancient Kausambi, India.[2] Here again, the goddess is standing on a full blown lotus with her left hand akimbo and the right raised towards her ear. Clusters of lotus flowers issuing from the lake are fenced by a railing. The date of this terracotta figurine is assigned to the 1st century B.C. Giving eloquent literary evidence for the goddess, V.S. Agrawala writes, "Padma-Sri standing on lotus is often mentioned in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. In the *Santiparva* it is said that goddess Padma-Sri wears ornaments of stars and a garland of starry designs *(tarabhakti)* and in this form she appeared in a lotus lake *(Santiparva* 218, 14)".[3] This indicates that the goddess should be standing on a lotus pond, wearing a lotus garland *(padma-malini)* and holding either a lotus bud or a flower in her hand. This description exactly tallies with the two terracotta figurines found at Tilaurakot (Pl. 10) and at Kausambi, India. The discovery of terracotta figurines of this goddess proves the popularity of the cult of Sri-Laksmi, particularly during the Sunga and Saka-Kushana periods.

Returning to our goddess Sri-Laksmi of Hadigaon, it is worthwhile to note that the goddess is wearing an entirely different type of anklet, hitherto unknown to the early sculptures of Nepal. Unlike other Mother Goddesses who usually wear heavy, round doughnut-shaped anklets, the anklets of Sri-Laksmi are deeply grooved into sharp segments to resemble ankle-bells. Such anklets are not found very often in Indian art. However, an example can be cited in the image of Vasudhara (Pl. 13) from Mathura Museum belonging to the 1st century A.D. who is shown wearing a similar type of anklet. Curiously enough, this type is never repeated again in any image in Nepal.

One of the most conspicuous features of Sri-Laksmi from Hadigaon is the pleats of the garment which are arranged in a decorative fold between the legs. The end of the garment is neatly folded, flat, against the supporting seat, making a decorative design (Fig. 35). Such folds are frequently depicted in a number of early images, particularly of Mother Goddesses. However, such a motif is totally absent in the images of the Licchavi, Thakuri or later periods. This evidence suggests that there existed an indigenous school in Nepal which persisted with a certain style, motif or trait of its own.

It would be relevent for our own study to trace the origin of these decorative folds. They are found in the well-known Yaksha statue from Parkham, where the lower garment is hanging between the legs, and the end is folded in a criss-cross design. Here, the pleats of the garment are shown by incised lines with a zigzag pattern (Fig. 30). It is probably the first time in the history of the plastic art of India that such a decorative fold was used. However, the folds are executed rather crudely. In later examples, mainly in the Yaksha and Yakshi figures from Bharhut, Bodhgaya and Amin, such a motif has often been noticed (Figs. 31, 32). The early form has a multifold design, while the later pattern has gradually been reduced to only two or three folds. The two-fold design shown in the Mithuna figures of Karle cave, India, can be attributed to the 1st century A.D. (Fig 33). Thus, the decorative design has frequently been used from the Maurya to the Sunga and early Kushana periods. As mentioned, such pleats of the garment in two folds are distinctly found in a number of early sculptures of Nepal, including the figure of Sri-Laksmi (Pl. 11). We shall later see how this distinctive motif has frequently been used in the early images found in the valley. Such details, no matter how trifling they may seem, definitely help us to compare stylistic developments and establish a

[1] B.K. Rijal, "Excavation and Other Archaeological Activities in Tilaurakot (Ancient Kapilavastu): 1973-1974" , *Ancient Nepal*, Journal of the Department of Archaeology, no. 16, pp. 39-45, Kathmandu.

[2] S.C. Kala, *Terracotta Figurines From Kausambi*, Allahabad, Municipal Museum, 1950, pl. xxi.

[3] V.S. Agrawala, *Ancient Indian Folk Cults*, op. cit., p. 149.

chronology for the early sculptures.

Although we have no historical evidence of any direct contact between Nepal and India during the early centuries of the Christian era, it is interesting to speculate how, in the distant past, the influence of such an art form could reach the valley of Kathmandu, isolated as it was in the Himalayas. Unless there was some direct or indirect contact between Nepal and northern India during the Kushana period, it is difficult to explain the presence of such a distinctive art motif in this mountain-girt country, nor can one attribute it to an accidental occurrence.

Another noteworthy feature in the image of Sri-Laksmi is the pattern of partially opened lotus-buds which spring up on each side from the feet of the goddess (Pl. 11). Here again, the manner in which the sculptor has treated the lotus is significantly reminiscent of the Mathura-Kushana mode (Pl. 14). As in India, the lotus as the symbol of cosmology, was extensively represented in Nepalese art from very early times. Beginning from the Maurya period, the artists of Bharhut, Sanchi, Bodhgaya, Amaravati, Nagarjunkonda, Mathura and the ancient caves of India, showed unsurpassed skill and talent in carving the lotus motif in various forms. Throughout the history of Indian art, no other floral motif has been used so frequently and abundantly. The lotus was primarily meant to represent water, abundance and prosperity. According to Coomaraswamy, "Water, Cosmology, the Plants, whose virility and healing powers are so much stressed in the literature, are almost invariably represented by the lotus, no doubt because of its directly evident origin in the Waters".[1]

Thus the goddess Sri-Laksmi is one of the earliest divinities to be constantly shown with *padma-pitha* or *padmasana*. She was also the goddess to be mentioned in the literature of *Sathapatha Brahmana*. It is apparent from the above accounts that Sri-Laksmi was one of the earliest goddesses to be represented in the art of India and Nepal.

As discussed already, the two-handed goddess Sri-Laksmi of Hadigaon has many early features which can be compared with the Mathura-Kushana images. She is sitting on a full-blown lotus with her feet apart, flanked by a partially open bud. On this stylistic ground she may be assigned to the 2nd century A.D.

[1] A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Yaksha*, Part II, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1977, p. 57.

Saptamatrika: The Seven Mother Goddesses

It has already been pointed out that for centuries, worship of the Mother Goddess was quite popular. The mother cult was later assimilated into the worship of Saptamatrika—the Seven Mother Goddesses. Though the usual accepted list of Mother Goddesses consists of only Seven Mothers, namely Brahmani, Vaisnavi, Mahesvari, Kumari, Indrani, Varahi and Chamunda, there are occasional variations in regard to their number in texts of a later date, in which Eight Mothers (Astamatrikas) or more are mentioned.

Regarding the origin of *matrikas,* the following story is told in the *Mahabharata:*

When Prahlada, a great devotee of Vishnu, renounced the worldly life, Andhakasura became the chief of the *asuras* (demons). By practicing austerities, Andhakasura obtained boons from Brahma which made him very powerful; then he began to harass the gods in many ways. The helpless gods headed for Kailasa to complain to Lord Siva who listened to them carefully. In the meantime, the *asura* chief, Andhakasura, appeared suddenly with the intention of carrying away Parvati, wife of Siva. In a fit of anger Siva began fighting with Andhakasura with his army of *ganas.* Siva shot him with an arrow, wounding him badly; blood began to flow profusely from the wound and from each drop of blood out came an Andhakasura and there appeared thousands of *asuras* who battled against Siva. Thereupon, Indra and the other gods sent their *saktis* (female powers) to kill the *asuras.* The *saktis* were Mahesvari, Vaisnavi, Brahmani, Kumari, Indrani, Varahi and Chamunda, the female counterparts of Mahesvara, Vishnu, Brahma, Kumara, Indra, Varaha and Yama respectively. The seven *matrikas* drank each drop of blood issuing from the wounds of Andhakasura, stopped further multiplication of *asuras,* and finally killed him.

According to the *Markandeya Purana,* the *matrikas* helped the goddesses Ambika and Chamunda to kill Raktavija, an ally of the most powerful demon king, Sumbha. Every drop of blood that oozed from the wounds of Raktavija produced a demon equal to himself. Thereupon, the *saktis* negated each drop of blood till he became helpless and was finally slain. These accounts indicate that the Mother Goddesses were worshipped as *saktis*—the *matrikas.*

It would be relevent here to give an account of Sati, wife of Siva, associated with *sakti* or *saktipitha.* According to the *Bhagavata Purana*, Sati, daughter of Daksha, was married to Siva. Once Daksha was performing a ceremony known as the Brihaspatisava. Even though uninvited, Sati went to her father's house. Daksha spoke insulting words against Siva in her presence and asked her to quit the house. The insult was too hard to bear so Sati jumped into the fire and burnt herself to death. When the news of the death of his beloved reached Siva, he sent his armies, consisting of *ganas,* under Virabhadra who destroyed Daksha's ceremony and punished him severely. Grief-stricken, Siva then began to roam about aimlessly with the corpse of his beloved wife on his shoulders. The whole universe was disturbed and the gods went to Vishnu and prayed to him to free Siva from the obsession of his grief. Vishnu then cut up Sati's body with his *chakra* (wheel) and pieces began to fall at different places. Wherever a part of Sati's severed body fell, it became a *saktipitha.*

This story of the different parts of Sati's body falling in different places in Nepal is a local

variation of the ancient story. According to Puranic tradition all the parts of Sati's body fell in different places in India. It was, however, only in a later period that the cult of *saktipitha* became popular and was widely prevalent throughout the kingdom. There are several *saktipithas* in Nepal. They are found not only in the valley itself but all over Nepal, mostly in temples or shrines; sometimes they are located in the foothills and are known as *maithans*. Wherever such *maithans* or *devithans* are located, this worship seems to be active and potent among Newars as well as non-Newars.

"Saktism was probably a development of the animistic belief in the Mother Goddess which was widespread among the non-Aryan tribes. In the more highly developed form of the cult, the functions of a primitive goddess 'of all work' have become divided into departments, and the various forces of Nature are personified under separate personalities, known as the Divine Mothers. These female energies are conceived of as the *saktis* of the primeval male, Purusha Siva, who is the counterpart of non-Aryan gods like Bhumiya or Khetrapala, the male consort of the Earth-Mother, by union with whom fertility is periodically renewed."[1]

Worship of the water-spirit, tree-spirit, forest-spirit and nature-spirit is based on animistic belief. This belief was popular among the primitive people and non-Aryan tribes of Nepal. Mountain-worship and river-worship is still common among the tribes of the Himalayan region. The non-Aryan hill tribes known as Rais and Limbus or Kiratas, are scattered in the eastern districts of Nepal. Each family has its own tutelary god known as *kuladevata* (family deity), worshipped only by the head of the family. No Vedic ritual or Brahmin priest is required for the worship. Above all the Brahmanical or Buddhist gods and goddesses, the *kuladevata* is the main divinity whose worship is performed in secret and no outsider is permitted to attend it. The Kiratas worship their *kuladevata* at home or elsewhere, or at the foot of rocks and caves with votive offerings of fowl and goats. The Kiratas also practice the worship of the *pitri*, their dead ancestors in symbolic or aniconic form and always regard them with great veneration. Ancestor worship is indeed one of the most ancient cults prevalent in many parts of the world.

The primitive faith of ancestor worship is still found among the Newars of the valley and many similarities can be drawn between the Kiratas and the Newars. For example, *degudya* is a amily deity attached to each clan or family to whom the Newars offer special devotion. The practice of *degupuja* or *devalipuja,* which is confined to the Newari community without any socio-religious functions, may be compared to the worship of *kuladevata* among the Kiratas, the Rais and Limbus. Each family or clan of the Newari community also has a *kuladevata* in the form of *degudya*. The antiquity of *degudya* goes back to the remote past. Its adherents believe in the existence of the souls of their dead ancestors wandering about at home or in fields. To evoke their dead ancestors, special attention is paid and *degupuja* performed, once a year or more often, if not daily. This practice is vigorously observed, especially by the Jyapus who are more conservative in their faith and are thought to be the direct descendants of the early Kiratas.

The tradition of mother worship in modern times in various temples, propitiating the tutelary goddess with sacrifices of animals or birds or an offering of eggs, certainly reflects primitive practices. Such worship is still in vogue in the valley. Numerous temples dedicated to primordial goddesses with different names such as Bhagavati, Varahi, Kali and Kumari, are the scenes of regular *devipuja*, sometimes using the blood of sacrificial animals and offerings of liquor. This undoubtedly symbolizes the quintessence of the mother cult.

Such worship, however, is associated with Tantric ritual. From the early medieval period, Tantrism became the most dominant factor in the religion of Nepal. There are many temples and shrines in and around the valley of Kathmandu such as Palanchok-Bhagavati, Sobha-Bhagavati, Nala-Bhagavati, Naksal-Bhagavati, Guhyesvari, Dakshina-Kali, Bhadra-Kali, Sveta-Kali, Rakta-Kali, Jai-Vagesvari, Nara-Devi, Maiti-Devi, Vatsala-Devi, Tunal-Devi, Nila-Varahi, Vajra-Varahi, Bala-Kumari, and Bagalamukhi, and many others, where devotees throng daily for worship.

In olden times, the people, and in particular, the Newars, spent a great deal of their time in ritualistic celebrations known as *jatras*. After the ritual ceremony the community of the *guthi* (a charitable family endowment) lavishly enjoy food and drink. Some of the religious festivities would last for days. To invoke the gods and goddesses animals are sacrificed, followed by ritual singing and dancing. Some tutelary goddesses are worshipped at night with animal sacrifice and sacrificial blood is sprinkled. This ancient belief is motivated by the desire for material gain, property and protection. Under the strong impact of Tantrism,

[1] J. Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, New York, vol. 2, p. 491.

the worship of the Mother Goddess is carried to an extreme by worshipping a living goddess in the form of Kumari, the virgin goddess. For most common Nepalese, Goddesses Kumari, Gauri, Parvati, Uma, Durga, Kali and Bhagavati all represent the same Mother Goddess as an aspect of fecundity and beneficence. Whether Durga or Kumari or Bhagavati or Hariti-Ajima, regardless of her true identity and pantheon, she is worshipped as primordial goddess with the same zeal and devotion. As a result of this deep-rooted faith which was indeed prevalent probably before the advent of the Indo-Aryans, the concept is still persistent among the people of this valley. Although several waves of immigrants from India have made their way into this beautiful valley over the centuries, the indigenous concept of a Mother Goddess remains the same. Once she had gained popularity among the ancient tribes, her status never waned. It must be noted that the development of an indigenous mother cult which has grown in Nepal since time immemorial has a most complex form. Mother Goddesses like Bhagavati, Kumari, Durga and Ambika are also worshipped as *mai, ma, mata, ajima, devi* or *matrika*. For most Nepalese, all female divinities are mothers who command a very high religious devotion. A comprehensive study of the cult of the Mother Goddess will reveal many layers of evolution of local goddesses.

It would be interesting to note how the mother cult originated and developed in later years. The growth of the mother cult may broadly be divided into three stages. The cult was widely prevalent during proto-historic times when the Indus Valley civilization flourished in the 3rd millennium B.C. This has already been discussed in the previous chapter.

We next find the concept of the Mother Goddess in association with the female deities of the Brahmanical pantheon. The representation of the Mother Goddess in ring-stones was in evidence as early as the 3rd century B.C. The earliest sculptural representation of Gaja-Laksmi and Sri-Laksmi was in the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C. These bear testimony to the prevalence of the mother cult. However, it was during the Kushana period that the iconographical traits of all female divinities were established. The artists of Mathura produced a large number of images of goddesses such as Gaja-Laksmi, Sri-Laksmi, Hariti, Mahisamardini, Durga and Saptamatrika. The concept of *matrika* eventually gave rise to the Sakti cult which influenced Hindu as well as Buddhist philosophical doctrines.

In the third phase, we find the cult of Sakti associated with Tantrism. The impact of Tantrism was so great that not only the various sects of the Saivas and Vaisnavas but also the Buddhists embraced the Tantric doctrine. Beginning from the medieval period, the worship of female divinities as *saktis* became the principal dogma and exercised a great influence in the whole realm of Hindu and Buddhist religion.

Though Buddha himself was against sacrifice, sorcery and necromancy, Mahayana Buddhism conceived the idea of Bodhisattva or Avalokitesvara as early as the 1st century A.D. The later development of Buddhist Tantrism was mainly of Vajrayana, Sahajayana and Kalachakrayana. Vajrayanists propounded the doctrine of Vajra or Sunyata (Void or Absolute) as the goal to be achieved by means of *mantras* (recitation), *mudras* (gesture), *mandalas* (diagrams), *kriyas* (ceremonies) and *charyas* (religious duties). These elements were later incorporated with *panchamakara* (five principal elements) such as *matsya, mamsa, madya, mudra* and *maithuna* (fish, meat, drink, gesture and sexual union). This ultimately led to many ritual observances and religious ceremonies with sacrifices of animals or sometimes even of human beings. Nalanda, Vikramsila and Uddandapura became great centres of Vajrayana Buddhism in eastern India and later influenced the neighbouring countries, including Nepal.

After the decline of Buddhism in India about A.D. 1200, Nepal became an important centre of the Tantric cult. Newari artists produced thousands of Tantric images in metal as well as in painting, of which the bulk went to satisfy the great demand in Tibet. Thus in religious art the cult of Sakti, the female goddess, remained a dominant factor. In small shrines where *saktipithas* are established, the goddesses, in the form of stones in their natural shape on the ground or below the surface of the earth, are venerated. Such shrine-pits by the roadside are a common sight in the valley.

The worship of Saptamatrika appears to be one of the most ancient and popular cults in Nepal. Evidently this cult was widely prevalent during the early centuries of the Christian era. However, it was probably during later periods that the worship of Astamatrika came into vogue, but they were normally worshipped in aniconic form. The discovery of a number of ancient sculptures of the Mother Goddesses is of great archaeological significance. A comprehensive study of these early *matrikas* which has never been done before will make for a more complete knowledge of various aspects of the mother cult in Nepal.

Two Early Mother Goddesses

The discovery of a number of ancient images of the Saptamatrikas, long ignored and neglected by earlier writers, will now throw new light on the development of early sculpture in Nepal. On the basis of discussions in previous chapters we may be sure that the worship of the Mother Goddess has definitely persisted since the remote past. We may assign at least twenty-four Mother Goddesses found in the valley to early periods.

One of the earliest Mother Goddesses, represented as *matrika,* is at Haugal-Bahal, Patan (Pl. 19). The goddess is installed in a shrine-pit, about four feet below the ground in a private courtyard. She is seated in *pralambapadasana* pose (that is in European fashion) on a throne, the carved legs of which are partly visible on both sides. Across the back seat is a triple folded decorated band and a separate loose band hanging right behind her shoulders. Over the head of the goddess is a plain umbrella-like canopy and above it is a relief of badly mutilated figures which could be images of lesser divinities associated with the *matrika*.

The original details of the oblong face of the goddess would have been very interesting but all details are worn, not because of mutilation but from daily worship by pouring water and offering vermilion powder and also by touching the face of the goddess. She is wearing *patrakundalas*—large, flat, circular earrings. She has bangles and *valaya* (armlets) of *makara* design while her anklets are plain, but heavy and conspicuous. The necklace is combined with a row of single beads.

If we consider the modelling of the figure as a whole, the primitive style is apparent. Unlike the other Mother Goddesses, her breasts are proportionately small, as though grafted. The bare torso, especially above the waist, is slender, stiff and short, while her heavy arms and thick solid thighs are strong and large. The goddess is seated with her knees apart but feet closer together similar to the figure of Lavanya Yakshi of Mathura Museum which is assigned to *ca.* 2nd century B.C. (Pl. 18). Even if no iconographical parallels can be drawn between the two figures, yet the trait of modelling and style of sitting are not unlike each other. The heavy doughnut-like anklets and the firmly planted feet of both figures undoubtedly establish a close affiliation.

The figure from Haugal-Bahal (Pl. 19) is undoubtedly one of the earliest images of the Mother Goddess found in the valley. Special attention should be given to the posture of her hand which is resting on her right thigh, suggesting *varadamudra*. The display of *varadamudra* is depicted in a peculiar manner, for it is not shown as an open palm but is carved rather awkwardly as a cupped palm. The fingers are long and disproportionate. This motif and also the pleats of the garment shown as a decorative fold over the supporting seat henceforth become ubiquitous features in all the early sculptures of the valley.

Some scholars have wrongly identified this image as Hariti, the Buddhist deity associated with children.[1] This image neither holds a child in her lap, as Hariti of Balaju (Pl. 55), nor is she surrounded by children, as in the case of Hariti of Chapatol, Patan (Pl. 57). Since the goddess is holding a fish in her left hand, an attribute associated with *matrika,* she may safely be identified as a Divine Mother, one of the *matrikas* and not Hariti. On stylistic grounds, we may assign the above Mother Goddesses to the late 2nd century A.D.

Another ancient Mother Goddess is found in the open premises of the small temple of Bhagavati at Kotaltol, Hadigaon (Pl. 15). Here, the goddess with heavy pendulous breasts and a thick-set body is sitting in European fashion. The posture with her legs apart is reminiscent of the Mother Goddesses of Kushana art. She is wearing heavy *kundalas* (earrings) attached to loops which are resting on her shoulders. This is an early type of earring worn by ancient female divinities in Nepal, particularly by Hariti of Balaju (Pl. 55). The necklace is a combination of two rows of beads resting above her massive breasts. She is wearing a dhoti which is attached to the waist and a triple folded sash is looped across the thighs, a common feature found in a number of early *matrika* images. A separate scarf falling from her left shoulder is hardly visible. The armlets she is wearing are badly worn and indistinguishable. Her left hand seems to be holding an abraded *sakti*, a spear or a staff, an attribute of the Mother Goddess. Thus it is safe to identify her as a Mother Goddess and not Sitala-mai as suggested by Slusser.[2] Right behind her head is a plain halo. Her face is completely abraded, however, and one of the interesting features to be noticed in this image is

[1] Pratapaditya Pal has identified this image as Hariti, *op. cit.*, fig. 59.

[2] M. Slusser, "Nepali Sculptures—New Discovery," in P. Pal (ed), *Aspects of Indian Art*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1972, p. 101.

the hair-style which is similar to Gaja-Laksmi of Naihiti (Pl. 7). On the basis of early features we may assign this image to the early 3rd century A.D.

This image is to be found partly buried in the open on the left side of the temple of Bhagavati. Inside the temple is an image of Karttikeya. He is represented with six heads, twelve arms and relevant attributes. As discussed already, he is said to be the son of six Krittika mothers. Although one may see the image of Karttikeya or Skanda inside the temple, the temple is dedicated to goddess Bhagavati, and an ancient image of a Mother Goddess stands outside the temple. Hadigaon is an ancient site and the original location of this early image might not have been far away from the temple. In fact the image of the Mother Goddess may have been originally installed inside the temple. The temple itself is hardly three or four hundred years old and the present image of Karttikeya is a work of the early Malla period. Because of natural calamities such as earthquakes, a new temple was in all probability constructed, replacing the old one, the worn-out image of the goddess was moved out, and a new image of Karttikeya-Skanda installed by some donor or donors. Since Mother Goddesses are associated with Skanda, his image was installed, but of course at a later date.

We now come to three Saptamatrikas from Balkhu, situated about seven miles south-west of Kathmandu. The site is also known as Mahadevathan. The Balkhu Khola is a small tributary of the Bagmati. A few years ago, hundreds of Licchavi coins were found on the banks of Balkhu Khola when it was inundated during the rainy season. No one knew for sure how these coins happened to be there. Was it a big cache by some unknown hoarder during the Licchavi period? Could it be that the coins were accumulated by the temple priest or by someone who left them and were then totally forgotten? When monsoon rains burst open the bank, damaging the ancient temple foundation, coins were scattered everywhere. This was a windfall for the villagers who evidently collected and sold them to the coin collectors in town. This is a very unusual event. The ancient belief among the Nepalese is that if any old coins are found they must not be brought inside the house because they are considered an ill omen. Even if such coins are picked up by children, elders will throw them away into the river or pond. This belief has died out and now the villagers are more aware of the antique value of old coins. Whatever might be the reason for the old coins being in Balkhu Khola, one thing is certain: it indicates an ancient site. In fact, on both sides of the rivulet there are shrines where devotees go regularly to worship different divinities. On one side of the bank is a shrine with stones in their natural shapes indicating *saktipitha*; on the other side, above the stream is a large open ground where an old Panchamukhi Siva-Linga stands inside a small shrine. A little further away are some images of a later period. But the most significant things about this place are the three ancient images of Saptamatrikas, set in niches in a low wall. These Mother Goddesses seem to have been neglected, perhaps for centuries, and are not worshipped any more.

The first image seems to be that of Kumari (Pl. 20). The goddess is sitting with her right leg pendant while the left is resting on the seat. The face is completely eroded and details are lacking. Although the upper part is mutilated, there is an indication that her left hand was holding a spear or *sakti* which is her attribute. Her right hand is held in *varadamudra* of which the shape is a cupped palm, very similar to the Mother Goddess from Haugal -Bahal (Pl. 19). She is wearing a single beaded necklace and heavy earrings which are identical to the Mother Goddess of Kotaltol (Pl. 15); there are also large anklets on her feet. Hardly visible is a large plain halo behind her head. Locks of hair fall on her broad and massive shoulders. Her upper part, mainly the torso, is short, while her breasts are smaller, again like the Mother Goddess of Haugal-Bahal (Pl. 19). The right thigh is large, heavy and strong, and spreads out across her seat in a pendant position.

The next figure is the image of Vaisnavi (Pl. 21), who is sitting with her left leg pendant and her right resting on the seat. Unlike the figures of her companions (Pls. 20, 22), here is a rather slender statue with four hands. The right rear hand appears to be holding a discus, an emblem of Vishnu, while the front right hand is held in *varadamudra*. So badly abraded is the image that no clear details are evident; hence it is difficult to establish the attributes of her right or her front left hands. Of all her ornaments, only heavy anklets on her legs are visible.

The third figure is that of the goddess Varahi (Pl. 22) who is sitting in *lalitasana* pose like her sister, goddess Kumari (Pl. 20). Here again the face is too badly worn for a detailed study. Her head is turned to the left and the locks of her hair are spread over her left shoulder. There seems to have been a large plain halo behind her head and shoulders, but this is completely mutilated. Her figure is heavy and

stocky with massive shoulders. The goddess is two-handed: her right hand is broken while her left hand seems to be holding a fish, an emblem of goddess Varahi. She is slightly pot-bellied and wears a dhoti in which a triple-fold sash is looped across the abdomen. Heavy anklets on her legs are indeed a significant feature of early images.

These goddesses are seated on plain seats without any rock-cut design on the pedestals. Actually a rock-cut design is seen only from the later part of the Licchavi period. The iconic representations of these images are relatively simple. Observe the coarse and unrefined native style which indeed reveals an early feature. On stylistic evidence, I am inclined to assign these images to the latter part of the 2nd century A.D. or the early 3rd century A.D.

The second group of early Saptamatrikas are those from the Bagalamukhi shrine at Kumbhesvara temple precinct, Patan. Bagalamukhi, another form of the goddess, is extremely popular among devotees from far and near. They pay homage by offering flowers, eggs and sacrificial fowl and animals. The complex of Kumbhesvara itself is an old site where ancient images like Vasuki (Pl. 69), Solar Divinity (Pl. 81), Uma-Mahesvara (Pl. 107) and Vishnu (Pl. 118) as well as a number of images of later date are found.

The six Mother Goddesses of the Bagalamukhi shrine are all mutilated above their waists and placed separately among other stones of iconic form; thus it is impossible to identify these divinities properly. For example, the first goddess, seated in *lalitasana* pose with her left leg resting on the seat and the right pendant, is placed on the right corner of the shrine (Pl. 23). Though badly mutilated and abraded, one can still see the right hand of the goddess held in *varadamudra,* somewhat crudely displayed, and also, an anklet on her right leg. The pleats of her garment as a decorative fold are represented in front as well as on the left side of the pedestal. Lack of other attributes makes it extremely difficult to establish a proper identification of this goddess.

The second goddess is also seated in *lalitasana* (Pl.24). In this image only her right leg and a faint mark of the decorative fold of her garment are visible and, here again, proper identification of this image is not possible.

The third goddess (Pl. 25), seated in a similar posture is holding a rosary and a water-pot in her right and left hands, respectively. Thus, she may be identified as Brahmani. It must be observed that the goddess is seated on a large lotus which is distinctly delineated round her seat. A triple-fold girdle goes around her hips indicating that the image was carved in the round. Besides the anklets on her legs, one notes also the pleats of her garment below her left leg as well as to the left of the pedestal.

The fourth goddess is to be found in the centre of the shrine, right in front of the main door, as the main deity. Her half mutilated body is partly buried in a pit. The pit is filled with water that oozes out in bubbles from underground. The goddess is surmounted with a *torana* and a metal headgear is placed above the stele. Laden with garlands and flowers by devotees, only the upper portion of the stele is partly visible. There is a depression on the top made by the countless fingers of devotees who touch the goddess and take *tika*, vermilion powder, from her. Once a week the shrine is cleaned and the goddess is given a bath by the priest. On one of these occasions the author was given permission to see the whole figure of the goddess (Pl. 26). She is seated in *lalitasana* like her sisters mentioned above, but the stele is so badly mutilated as well as abraded that details are hardly visible. A close scrutiny will, however, show faint marks of the sash around her hip and the pleats of her garment on the left side of the pedestal. The goddess is undoubtedly one of the *matrikas* but her proper identification would be impossible to establish.

The fifth goddess (Pl. 27) is seated in the same posture as her companions. Her right hand is crudely displayed in *varadamudra* while the left is missing. Here, too, the decorative folds of her garment are depicted in the front and on the left side of the pedestal. Anklets on her legs are the only ornaments. Proper identification of this goddess at this stage is not possible.

The sixth goddess (Pl. 28) who is also seated in *lalitasana* pose may be identified as goddess Varahi, for she is holding a fish in her right hand and a wine-cup in her left, of which the details are abraded. A three-fold sash, looped across her hip, is displayed in a fashion similar to her companion. Also, the pleats of her garment as a decorative fold are neatly depicted below the left leg and on the left side of the pedestal. The representation of the pleats as a motif becomes a common feature especially in the early sculptures of the Mother Goddess. However, it must be noted here that only in the Mother Goddesses of Bagalamukhi, are the pleats shown in front as well as on the left side of the stele.

A close study of these Mother Goddesses referred to above reveals not only their diminutive form but also the style of carving which is reminiscent of the Mathura-Kushana sculptures. The crudeness, for instance, of the cupped hand held in *varadamudra* is almost primitive and indicates an early attempt. Although the figures of the Mother Goddesses are all mutilated above the waist, the heavy and large hips against the small and slender waists are conspicuous. These are the significant characteristics found in the early images of Mother Goddesses and are not found in the sculptures of the Licchavi or post-Licchavi period. On these stylistic grounds, the Mother Goddesses of Bagalamukhi may be assigned to the 2nd or 3rd centuries A.D.

We shall now discuss the third group of Saptamatrikas from Bhagavati temple, Jaibagesvari. One of the goddesses, buried on the left side in the temple, is so badly affected by erosion that it resembles an old wooden sculpture with wrinkles and cracks (Pl. 29). It is interesting to note that almost all the ancient sculptures of Nepal belonging to the early centuries of the Christian era are abraded and affected by erosion rather than by mutilation. In contrast most of the sculptures of the Licchavi period, say from the last quarter of the 5th century A.D., are much less abraded but many of them are broken or mutilated. Also details of faces, hands and ornaments of early images are gone, due probably to constant touching and pouring of water.

Here, too, all the details of this goddess (Pl. 30) are largely absent, making accurate identification difficult. A close scrutiny will, however, reveal that she is holding a *sakti* or spear in her left hand; hence she could be identified as Kumari. This spear is similar to that of Karttikeya from Kamaladi (Pl. 31), datable to the 11th century A.D., or of Karttikeya from Ombahaltol (Pl. 32), assignable to the 13th century. In both the images, the similarity of the spear is fairly close to the one which goddess Kumari of Jaibagesvari is holding. It is difficult to say whether the right hand of the goddess was held in *varadamudra*, for no such details are visible. The goddess is wearing a flat type of earring like *patrakundala* and her garment appears to have been attached to her waist, while a sash is looped across the abdomen.

Another significant feature is her distinctive hair-style. Her two tresses fall from the small central bun on either side behind the ears, similar to the Mother Goddess of Kotaltol (Pl. 15), or Gaja-Laksmi of Naihiti (Pl.7), or Hariti of Balaju (Pl. 55), thus indicating a stylistic unity with the early Mother Goddesses. A plain halo, though partly mutilated, is visible; that too, reveals an early feature. In stylistic traits she is close to the Mother Goddess of Kotaltol (Pl. 15). On her left is a worn-out head, partially buried in the ground (Pl.34); in shape it is similar to the heads of other Mother Goddesses. The details are not visible and this fragment must have been a part of a Mother Goddess whose proper identity cannot be established at this stage.

Another image of a Mother Goddess, in the left corner is also buried to the waist (Pl. 33). Though details of her round face are missing, her ornaments are slightly visible and consist of heavy earrings, a necklace and bracelets. The style of her coiffure is similar to that of the goddess Kumari (Pl.29). Behind her head, too, is a plain halo. She has large breasts, a slender waist and heavy, spreading hips. Her left hand appears to be holding a trident, an attribute of Mahesvari, while her right hand may have been displayed in *varadamudra*. Thus the goddess may be identified as Mahesvari, the counterpart of Siva—the great god Mahesvara. Judging from the stylistic elements of the *matrikas* discussed above they may be assigned to the early 3rd century A.D.

In the same Bhagavati temple, facing the door, is a second image, that of Vaisnavi (Pl. 35). In contrast to the other Mother Goddesses, this image is fairly well preserved. She is four-handed and her limbs are strong and heavy. The upper right hand is holding a discus and the lower, a boss. Her upper left hand is holding a mace and the lower, a conch. She has a round and chubby face with small lips and a plain halo behind her head with a thin outline incised around the border. The goddess seems to be sitting in *lalitasana*, but the modelling of the ornaments and the hair-style are not indicative of early features. Therefore, stylistically as well as iconographically, this statue could be said to belong to the 6th century A.D.

Very recently another image of a Mother Goddess was found at Maligaon (Pl. 17), only a few minutes' walk from the image of Kotaltol mentioned above. The goddess is half buried in the middle of a drainage ditch and faces danger of being completely damaged by drainage water during a heavy monsoon. She is seated in *lalitasana* pose with her left leg pendant while the right is resting on the seat. The face is eroded and details are missing. Behind her head, a plain halo, partly damaged, is visible.

One sees here that the design of the earrings and necklace, and the style of draping the

dhoti and sash, and the hairdo are identical to that of the Mother Goddess of Kotaltol (Pl. 15). Her right hand is awkwardly held in *varadamudra* and in her left hand is a *sakti*. She can therefore be identified as Kumari. On the basis of style, this image may be assigned to the early 3rd century A.D.

On the left of this image is a figure of another Mother Goddess which is buried in the ground and only part of her head is visible. A detailed study is therefore not possible.

It must be noted that the early Mother Goddesses are shown in *pralambapada* posture, seated, with the knees drawn apart and the feet slightly closer together (Pls. 15, 19, 55). The second type of Mother Goddesses are seated in *lalitasana* pose, with one leg pendant and the other leg resting on the seat. Henceforth, this posture becomes a common feature in the images of Saptamatrikas.

The fourth group of Mother Goddesses is found in the ancient city of Kirtipur, situated on a hill-top on the southern outskirts of Kathmandu, where the inhabitants are mostly Newars and still cling to their old beliefs and traditional ways of life. Opposite the well-known Bagh Bhairava temple, there is a small shrine of Ganesa, where a group of ancient images of Saptamatrikas are found. These female divinities are tucked away in niches, for the main attraction for devotees is not the Mother Goddesses but the image of Ganesa of the Licchavi period, datable to the 6th or 7th centuries, A.D. Hence the five Mother Goddesses are virtually ignored and their proper identification unknown. Not only the Mother Goddesses, but also the image of Siva-Parvati and the standing Siva on their right, are completely ignored. (The description of the latter two will be given in a subsequent chapter.)

Local people have different stories to tell about the ancient Mother Goddesses of Kirtipur. The Divine Mothers are no longer revered or worshipped as Mother Goddesses, for the local people regard them as five sheep, while four others have been eaten by a clay tiger during the absence of the herdsmen. In order to punish the tiger, they removed his tongue, and, indeed, a tongueless clay tiger stands in the Bagh Bhairava temple, opposite the shrine. The local people believe that the image of Siva-Parvati and the standing Siva in the same shrine are herdsmen who still guard the five standing sheep. Needless to say, these are just legends.

Among the five *matrikas*, the first is goddess Vaisnavi (Pl. 37), who is seated with her right leg folded on the seat and the left pendant. Only the front two hands of the goddess are seen; the rear hands might already have been damaged before the image was stacked on the wall. The goddess is wearing a necklace, bracelets, heavy anklets and large earrings similar to the Mother Goddess of Kotaltol (Pl. 15), and Hariti of Balaju (Pl. 55). Her garment is attached to the waist, while the central folds are gathered and brought forward below the right leg, and are neatly pleated into a decorative fold, a unique feature in the early images of Nepal. A triple folded sash is looped across the abdomen similar to the dress worn by the Mother Goddess of Kotaltol. The figure is stocky, with wide shoulders, a short neck, large breasts, sturdy arms and heavy legs. Though eroded, the faint details of her face are noteworthy, for her sublime face is motherly and full of compassion and love. Unlike the hair-style of Gaja-Laksmi of Naihiti, (Pl. 7), Hariti of Balaju (Pl. 55) or the Mother Goddess of Kotaltol (Pl. 15), her hair is done in a simple manner; it seems to have been parted in the middle and slightly raised in the centre indicating an ornament (Fig. 29). A similar type of hair-style is also seen in the image at Haugal-Bahal (Pl. 19) and on the female attendant of the Solar Divinity of Kumbhesvara (Pl.81).

The goddess has a conch in her left hand and a lotus-bud in her right, but the remarkable feature is the type of lotus she holds, for it is similar to the lotus bud of the Surya image of Mathura (Pl. 36). The latter image is undoubtedly a product of the Mathura-Kushana period datable to the 1st century A.D. This representation of such a *nilotpala* bud is unique in Nepal and, to my knowledge, no lotus motif has ever been repeated in any stone sculpture of the valley. Furthermore, one can see a great difference in style between the Vaisnavi of Kirtipur (Pl. 37) and that of Hadigaon (Pl. 38) which is a work of the late 14th century A.D.

The second goddess on the left of Vaisnavi is Brahmani whose two legs are folded in *padmasana* on a large double lotus (Pl. 39). The details of her face are lost but she is wearing flat earrings of the *patrakundala* type and a necklace of a single string of beads, with a large one in the centre. The pleats of her garment in front of her lotus-seat are in a decorative fold, similar to the goddess Vaisnavi on her right. She has large, firm breasts and broad shoulders. Her left hand is holding a flask, while the right is mutilated. It must be observed that the style of the double lotus on which the goddess is sitting has a close affinity with the lotus of the Bharhut or Bodhgaya railings, belonging to the 2nd or 1st centuries B.C. If a comparison is

drawn between the Brahmani of Kirtipur (Pl. 39) and that of Hadigaon, datable to the late 14th century (Pl. 40), one finds a great difference in style and mode of carving, as well as in dress.

The third goddess with a round face sitting in *lalitasana* pose on the left of Brahmani may be identified as goddess Kumari (Pl. 41). Traditionally, the goddess should be holding either a banner, lance or spear, symbolizing *sakti*, in her left hand. Her left hand is holding a long spear, the handle of which is well decorated from top to bottom. In her right hand, she has a partly mutilated flower, presumably a full blown lotus. She is wearing a necklace, bracelets, anklets and enormous earrings similar to goddess Hariti of Balaju (Pl. 55) or the Mother Goddess of Kotaltol (Pl. 15). The pleats of her garment are on the pedestal under her left foot, and the garment itself is similar to those of the goddesses sitting at her sides.

The fourth goddess, in a posture like Kumari, may be identified as Mahesvari, for she is holding a full blown lotus in her right hand and a trident in her left, the long handle of which is well decorated (Pl. 43). Though worn, it is still possible to trace her ornaments such as a necklace, armlets, bracelets, anklets and large, flat earrings. Her dress is similar to the goddesses at her side. The distinctive pleats of her garment as a decorative fold are gathered below her left leg. In contrast to the figure of Mahesvari of Hadigaon (Pl. 42), she is of strong physical stature with broad shoulders.

The fifth goddess sitting in *lalitasana* is undoubtedly Varahi (Pl. 45). She has the face of a boar. Her thick-set body, heavy arms, large breasts and slightly protruding belly are characteristic of a Varahi image. She is facing right, spreading her hair on her left shoulder. The pleats of her garment are arranged in a decorative fold below her right leg, similar to other *matrikas*. Note also a plain halo behind her head. Her physical bearing is more dynamic and the lines of her body more rhythmical than the goddess Varahi of Hadigaon (Pl. 44). She is holding a cup in her left hand and a fish in her right hand, the main attributes of goddess Varahi.

These images of five *matrikas* reveal many early features in their ornaments, dress, modelling and also in their iconographical forms. These elements leave us in no doubt that they belong to an early group, and on this evidence they may be assigned to the 3rd century A.D. Though Pal has very briefly discussed these Mother Goddesses of Kirtipur and assigned them to the 3rd-4th centuries,[1] he has not made any attempt to identify each of them nor has he fully discussed their stylistic form and iconographical features. On the other hand, Slusser has wrongly identified these images as Sitala-Ajima,[2] no doubt based on the interpretation of the local people who worship all *matrikas* as Sitala-Ajima. It is more than apparent that images of Hariti-Sitala are never found together in a group as Saptamatrikas. In Mathura-Kushana art, Hariti is placed with Kubera (Pl. 56), or sometimes with Laksmi and Kubera (Pl. 58), sharing a common pedestal.

Mention must now be made of the two *matrikas* found in Tunaldevi temple at Vishalnagar near Hadigaon (Pl. 46a). They are placed among deities in aniconic form. When discovered they were thickly coated with dried blood and vermilion, concealing their real shape and identity. Unlike the images of *matrikas* discussed above, these two Mother Goddesses share the same pedestal, but their posture and manner of sitting are similar to ancient Mother Goddesses. These two figures seem to be part of a group of Mother Goddesses, for the pedestal to the right of the goddesses indicates the previous existence of another deity obviously broken off. The heads of both goddesses are mutilated, but faintly visible are the *saktis* in their left hands.

These could possibly be a trident and a lance, indicating the emblems of Mahesvari and Kumari. Details of their right hands are also lost due to abrasion; most probably they were held in *varadamudra*. Of the ornaments, only heavy anklets are visible. From the point of view of old motifs found in these images one thing is certain: they belong to the early group of *matrikas* and may be assigned to the 3rd-4th centuries A.D.

Another image of Vaisnavi is found in a niche of a traveller's shelter—Pati at Subalhiti, Patan (Pl. 48). The goddess is four-handed and sits in *lalitasana* pose and, like other *matrikas*, she too is abraded. However, one can still trace the position of her right front hand which is held in *varadamudra*, while the upper right hand holds a discus (*chakra*). The front left hand is completely broken and the upper left hand seems to be holding a mace. Though not clear, the hair-style of the goddess is closer to the style of

[1] P. Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
[2] M. Slusser, *op. cit.*, p.93 In her paper, Slusser has attempted to discuss these images and referred to them as "a puzzling group of images which the Nepali now worship as Sitala, the goddess of small-pox."

the Mother Goddess of Kotaltol (Pl. 15) or Hariti of Balaju (Pl. 55). There should be no confusion, for she can be identified as Vaisnavi, belonging to the group of Saptamatrikas, and not Sitala-Ajima as suggested by Slusser. On the basis of stylistic unity with the other ancient Mother Goddesses which we have so far discussed, we can assign it to the late 3rd or early 4th centuries A.D.

A mutilated figure of a Mother Goddess was recently found at the Satyanarayana temple complex, Hadigaon (Pl. 47). The fragment was found lying on the open ground. One can but wonder how it happened to be there separated from the rest of her companions. It does not take long to identify an image of a *matrika* when one is adequately familiar with the iconography, style, modelling, ornaments and dress of these ancient Mother Goddesses, hence it is easy to see that this fragment, too, belongs to a group of Saptamatrikas. It is curious, though, how images of Divine Mothers get separated from their groups. Some are found with a few companions, some alone, while others are ignored, mutilated or found scattered in a field, stuck on the wall, or lying unnoticed in a corner of the temple precincts.

Here, too, the detail of the fragment is lost due to abrasion, but the style of her ornaments helps us not only to identify the goddess but also to establish a fairly precise date. The goddess is wearing enormous earrings like those of Kumari from Kirtipur (Pl. 41), and the goddess of Kotaltol (Pl. 15). She has broad shoulders and a round face, indicating their stylistic unity. A lance or *sakti* seems to have been on her left, hence she could be either Kumari or Mahesvari. A proper identification is difficult, but this fragment can be grouped together with the ancient Mother Goddesses and may be dated to the late 3rd century A.D.

There is an image of a headless Mother Goddess at Vincheybahal, Patan (Pl. 46), worshipped as Ajima by the local people. The style of this image is similar to the other Mother Goddesses already described. She sits in *lalitasana* pose with her right foot pendant and the left resting on the seat. She wears the usual dress, necklace, armlets and anklets. Her right hand is displayed in *varadamudra* in the same awkward manner as seen in the early sculptures. The attribute of her left hand is indistinguishable. It looks as though it is holding a lotus flower, but owing to its mutilation it is difficult to establish this with reasonable certainty. On the basis of style this image can be assigned to the 4th or 5th centuries A.D.

Now we shall discuss the three images of the Mother Goddesses belonging to the Saptamatrika group from the Kamaladi Ganesa temple. These images are set in niches facing the temple. The images are locally worshipped as Sitala-Ajima, yet they are not the images of Sitala, though Slusser too, has wrongly identified them as such!

These images are badly mutilated, therefore proper identification is difficult. The first goddess (Pl. 49) is sitting in the *lalitasana* pose, but unlike the other Mother Goddesses who are usually shown with one leg pendant and the other folded, resting on the seat, here the folded leg of the goddess is not actually on the seat but suspended in a folded posture. Although the hands and face are mutilated, her large earrings, single-beaded necklace and large anklets are visible. The goddess has a thick-set body and is wearing a garment tied to the waist with the central fold falling between the thighs and brought forward where a decorative fold is made on the pedestal. Also note that the pleats of her garments are quite different, unlike the decorative folds of the Mother Goddesses discussed above. A thrice-folded sash is looped across the abdomen, its ends hanging on the left side. There is an additional scarf on her left shoulder like that of the main figure of the Solar Divinity (Pl. 81). Though mutilated, a plain halo can be seen behind her head. It is also difficult to establish her attributes but she appears to be holding a conch in her left hand and her right hand may have been held in *varadamudra* like her companion sitting on the extreme left (Pl. 51). In this case the goddess could be Vaisnavi (Pl. 49).

The second goddess, seated in a similar fashion, may be identified as Varahi (Pl. 50), for she has the face of a boar, heavy shoulders, is full-breasted, with strong arms with her hair over her left shoulder, while her face is turned to her right. She wears the same dress and ornaments as her companions. Her right hand seems to be in *varadamudra* while the attribute of her mutilated left hand cannot be established. In all probability, she is holding a fish, her main attribute. Here again, a plain halo is seen behind her head.

The third goddess, too, is sitting in similar manner as her companions and has the same kind of dress. Her right hand is in *varadamudra* but her left hand, as well as her face, is badly damaged, thus making it more difficult to establish a proper identification. She could be either Kumari or Mahesvari.

From the above description it is certain that the goddesses of Kamaladi belong to a

Saptamatrika group. It was also observed that these Mother Goddesses are sitting on a simple pedestal without any rock-cut design. Their posture, modelling and iconographical traits are also nearly the same as those of the ancient goddesses. However, there are some indications which reveal that they belong to a slightly later period. For instance, the design of the pleats of the garments and the posture of the legs resting on the pedestal do not exactly tally with ancient *matrikas* from Kirtipur (Pls. 37,39, 41, 43, 45). Hence this group of *matrikas* from Kamaladi may be assigned to the early 5th century A.D.

Mention must be made of an inscribed Varahi image found at the Ganesa temple, Mahaboudha, Kathmandu (Pl. 53). The goddess is sitting in *lalitasana* posture and holding a fish in her right hand and a cup in her left. A comparison may be drawn here between the Varahi of Mahaboudha mentioned above and the Varahi of Kirtipur (Pl. 45). The Kirtipur Varahi is slightly pot-bellied and has broad and massive shoulders. In contrast, the Mahaboudha Varahi, though well preserved, lacks dynamism. Her belly is slenderly built, has short legs and sits rather stiffly in *lalitasana*. Noteworthy is the absence of the decorative folds of the garment, a common feature seen in the early *matrika* images (Pls. 19, 25, 26, 27, 37, 39, 41, 43, 45, 48). Such decorative folds are never found in any *matrika* images belonging to the Licchavi or later periods. The style of carving also indicates a later date. Gautam Vajracharya, who first published the material in regard to the inscription of this image of a Mother Goddess, [1] made no mention of a possible date for this inscription, whereas Dhanavajra Vajracharya made a very brief comment on the inscription and, on the grounds of palaeography, indicated the time of Vasantadeva, the Licchavi king, corresponding to the early 6th century A.D.[2] Stylistically, however, this image may be assigned to the later part of the 6th century A.D.

We should also refer to an image of a Mother Goddess which is found buried to the waist at a small pit behind the Ganesa temple, Chabahil (Pl. 52). Her face is completely damaged but her large breasts, broad shoulders and spreading arms are visible. Her right hand seems to be in *varadamudra*, while the attribute of her left hand is not visible. She is wearing a necklace of single beads and large earrings. Proper identification of this image is difficult to make, but she undoubtedly belongs to a *matrika* group. Dating of this image would be equally challenging; however, this may be assigned to not earlier than the 6th century A.D.

On the southern side of the Pasupati temple precinct there are images of Saptamatrikas sitting side by side. As photographs are not allowed to be taken nor sketches to be done a detailed description would be futile. Moreover, these images do not at all belong to the early group, for stylistically they are of the 9th or 10th centuries A.D.

Now, for the first time, a large number of ancient sculptures of Saptamatrikas have come to light. Many more might still be hidden in temples, shrines, water-spouts, open fields or even in lanes and byways. The existence of so many ancient images of Mother Goddesses may easily be understood. The Indo-Aryan immigrants who found their way into this valley surrounded by forested hills and mountains, being away from their homelands, may have sought the protection of the Divine Mother Goddesses. The cult became more and more popular within the matrix of indigenous elements and thus the worship of Saptamatrika became a salient feature in Nepal.

[1] Gautam Vajracharya, *Kailash*, A Journal of Himalayan Studies, Kathmandu, vol. 1. no.2, 1973, p. 122.
[2] Dhanavajra Vajracharya, *op. cit.*, p. 582.

Hariti

From the beginning of the Christian era, the cult of Hariti, the Buddhist goddess of children, seems to have spread from Central Asia to Magadha (Gaya district, Bihar) and Nepal. According to Buddhist tradition she was a female deity of Rajagriha. Because of an unholy wish in one of her previous births she indulged in robbing the children of Rajagriha and feeding herself and her five hundred sons on them. Thus she was named Hariti, the one who steals. When the Buddha visited Rajagriha, people complained to him about the ogress who devoured their children. In order to teach her a lesson, the Buddha hid one of her youngest sons. Hariti looked everywhere for him and, not finding him, approached the Buddha for help. "You are feeling so distressed for only one son," said the Buddha, "think of those mothers whom you have deprived of their sons." This was a great lesson for her; the Buddha pardoned all her sins and she became the benevolent guardian deity of children.

It is interesting to note, however, that the cult of Hariti seems to have evolved much earlier than this, and in all probability this goddess was associated with the ancient female deity of folk religion. The primitive people had great veneration for her who was regarded as the goddess of infant diseases. She is associated with Jataharini, equivalent of the Buddhist Hariti whose very name denotes a remover of children. Thus Hariti and Jataharini have the same meaning. Jara was the name of another *grihadevi*, a household deity, whose figure was painted on the walls of the royal palace along with drawings of her numerous children.[1] V.S. Agrawala writes about this folk goddess, "Rajagriha was surrounded on all sides by the settlement of Austric population. Probably some female *rakshasi* was worshipped by them with offerings of blood and flesh and her name was Jara. The goddess Jataharini who was of malevolent nature and the destroyer of children was an elevation of Jara in Buddhist tradition."[2]

This reference indicates that from very ancient times the folk deity (*Loka-devi*) who was regarded as the guardian deity of infants, had great influence over primitive people. Evidently this folk goddess was later associated with Jataharini, Jara and the Buddhist Hariti or the Brahmanical goddess of small-pox, Sitala.

We find that the cult of *matrika* is also associated with another ancient goddess, Revati, known for her various forms as Bahurupa. She is said to have assumed the form of Jataharini who afflicted children. It is she who "causes abortion of a foetus; she brings about the mortality of infants after their birth; she destroys those who are in course of being born and also those who will take birth in future".[3] Probably this belief was strongly prevalent among the primitive people like the Austrics or Nisadas who worshipped this female divinity with votive offerings out of fear rather than respect, to save themselves and their children from the wrath of the dreaded goddess. It is no wonder that goddess Revati once enjoyed a prominent position among all other goddesses. We know this from the *Kasyapasamhita*. The goddess of

[1] V.S. Agrawala, *op.cit.*, pp. 85-86.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 86.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

children from the remote past exercised a far-reaching influence.

The study of ancient folk divinities will throw interesting light on the evolution of ancient gods and goddesses and their original forms. From the above accounts one sees that the ancient folk goddess was identified as the Brahmanical Sitala, goddess of small-pox, who is also associated with other local goddesses such as Ajima in Nepal.[1] The worship of Hariti in the form of Ajima must have been very popular among the early settlers of the valley, as it is today. Although the Buddhist Hariti is described as an ogress who was later converted into the protectress of children by the Buddha, in Nepal goddess Ajima is worshipped with great veneration, not only as a guardian deity of children but also as a Divine Mother. Both male and female devotees perform rituals and offer prayer to this most respected of goddesses. Thus the worship of Hariti, as a local goddess, Ajima, must have been continued in the valley of Nepal for centuries.

Among the original inhabitants of the valley, and the Newars in particular, two elements seem to have dominated their beliefs: the intermingling of Hindu and Buddhist faiths on the one hand, and the primitive practices and non-Brahmanical rituals of indigenous origin on the other. As discussed in the previous chapters, the worship of the Mother Goddess has been by far the most popular in Nepal. Regardless of their sectarian affiliation, the worship of Ajima is characteristically a salient feature in Newari society. The dreaded goddess of small-pox popularly known as Ajima to the Newars, Sitala or Sitala-mai to the Hindus, and Hariti to the Buddhists is the goddess of children who is more highly revered than feared. Ajima is believed to have six more sisters and apparently this indicates her association with the Saptamatrikas.

The early representations of Hariti may be traced in the art of Gandhara, north-west of Pakistan, where a number of images and stupas of Hariti are found. Local legend persisted in Gandhara that the conversion of Hariti by the Buddha took place here. But the cult of Hariti in Gandhara may be traced to a much earlier time. Evidently there prevailed the worship of a goddess under the name of Bhimadevi, a female deity who was known for her cruel nature. This indeed reflects the ancient folk cult which was prevalent in the Gandhara region. In the art of Gandhara, Hariti is most often represented as holding a son on her lap or sometimes even suckling the infant, surrounded by many children. She is also frequently depicted as accompanied by Pancika, her consort. In these sculptures, however, the Graeco-Roman style predominates.

In the art of the Mathura-Kushana period, Hariti is shown as holding a child on her lap (Pl. 54), or with her consort Kubera (Pl. 56), or sometimes accompanied by Kubera and Laksmi (Pl. 58). Though she is a Buddhist goddess of children, these representations nevertheless attest to her association with other folk divinities.

In spite of her immense popularity, only a few stone images of Hariti-Sitala exist in the valley of Kathmandu. To the knowledge of the author there are three such images, one each at Balaju, Swayambhu and Chapatol in Patan (Pl. 57). The Hariti-Sitala of Swayambhu is extremely popular, drawing streams of devotees every day. On the other hand, the Hariti-Sitala of Chapatol, Patan, found in the narrow backyard of a house and known only to a small segment of local people, casually attracts a lone devotee. Curiously enough, there are a number of other images which are wrongly worshipped as Sitala or Ajima by the local people. One such image in the Kumbhesvara temple precinct is very popular and draws a number of devotees every day. However, this image (Pl. 81) does not actually belong to the group of Hariti-Sitala.

An interesting image of Hariti-Sitala—probably the only one belonging to the group of early sculptures—is found in a small shrine at Balaju, opposite the sleeping Vishnu. This Hariti-Sitala (Pl. 55) is seated in *pralambapada* posture, with the knees wide apart and the feet closer together. The face, the heavy pendulous breasts, the necklace and hands are badly worn. The features of the child are not sharp either, due to abrasion. The right hand of the goddess is placed on her knee and, though hardly distinguishable, it is held in *varadamudra*, and not holding a boss as suggested by Pal.[2] The holding of a boss, a lotus seed, a fruit or a *vijapuraka* by a divinity is a slightly later version which appears to have been in vogue in Nepalese sculpture only from the late 4th century A.D. and not earlier. Not a single sculpture prior to the 4th century A.D. can be cited as holding a boss. A few images belonging to the late 4th century are seen holding a boss in their right hands (Pls. 79, 86). Later, this becomes an ubiquitous feature in Nepalese art and remained so for centuries. As discussed already, the display of *varadamudra*, with long and

[1] The Newari meaning of *ajima* is "grandmother".
[2] P. Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

disproportionate fingers in the shape of a cupped palm, is found only among the early sculptures. The line of the *kanthahara* (necklace) resting on the upper edges of the breasts, apparently with a pendant, is badly worn, but one can see the bracelets on both hands. The toes are prominently and minutely worked out and the fingers are distinctly separated, similar to the toes of Vasuki (Pl. 69). The goddess is seated on a high stool which has carved legs, similar to the rudimentary throne of the Mother Goddess of Haugal Bahal (Pl. 19). The image is fixed within a much later frame surrounded by a *torana* in stone with a roof temple. Her hair-style is quite similar to Gaja-Laksmi of Naihiti, Patan (Pl. 7) or a number of early Mother Goddesses. Her earrings are large and of *amalaka* shape.

A close parallel to the Balaju Hariti-Sitala (Pl. 55) is a Hariti of the Kushana period from Mathura Museum (Pl. 54). A cursory glance at the two images mentioned above will reveal that the large pendulous breasts, the sitting posture and the pattern of the anklets are almost the same in all cases. The composition and stylistic traits are also not dissimilar. The only difference one may point out is in the manner of holding the child. In the Balaju Hariti-Sitala, the child is held on the left thigh supported by the left hand and is in proportion to the figure of the goddess; whereas in the Mathura Hariti, a small babe is lying flat in the lap of the goddess, as though a flamboyant symbol of fertility. Here the goddess is accompanied by children, presumably her sons, who are playing around their mother.

For a comparative study it is relevant to discuss the Hariti-Sitala of Chapatol, Patan (Pl. 57), where the goddess is sitting with her right leg half pendant and the left folded and resting, level with the seat. About three decades ago the face and breasts were badly mutilated by an enraged father who lost his children despite worship, prayers and votive offerings to the goddess. She is wearing simple ornaments consisting of a beaded necklace, heavy earrings and plain but prominent bracelets. The goddess is holding a boss in her right hand and on the left, a child is sitting on her thigh and playing with the boss. She is seated against a plain background and right behind her head is a halo with an incised outline. Besides the child on her lap, four other children are playing around her.

Stylistically the narrow and slender shoulders of the goddess and the rock design in front of her seat with a disc in the centre are not early features; they could be products of an even later date than the 6th century as suggested by Pal,[1] but to accept the 14th century date attributed by D.R.Regmi[2] would be too arbitrary.

To determine the age of our other Balaju Hariti-Sitala (Pl. 55), one has to examine it carefully and compare it with other images. We have noticed many early features in this image: for example, the plain circular halo behind her head, the cupped palm, the heavy anklets on her feet and the hair-style. These motifs are found only in early sculptures of the valley. On this basis we may safely assign it to the late 2nd or early 3rd centuries A.D.

[1] P. Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

[2] D.R. Regmi, *Medieval Nepal*, Part II, Calcutta, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyaya, 1969, pl. 5.

Mahisamardini

In some chapters of the *Markandeya Purana,* under the title of the *Devi Mahatmya,* there is a description of various forms of the Mother Goddess such as Mahisamardini, Chamunda and the *matrikas*. Numerous images of Mahisamardini have been found in Mathura, an indication of her popularity during the Kushana period. It appears that she was associated with the ancient folk deity of the Austric tribe, later assimilated in the cult of Durga or Mahisamardini. Goddess Mahisamardini, in the form of Durga, protects the individual from Mahisa who is regarded as the manifestation of evil and death. There is a vivid account in the *Durga Saptasati* about the fight between the goddess Mahisamardini and the buffalo demon, Mahisa. According to this, the goddess jumped upon the great demon, attacked him with her leg and struck at his neck with a trident or spear.[1]

As in India, the worship of Mahisamardini or Mahisasuramardini, slayer of the buffalo demon Mahisa who tyrannized the universe, was prevalent in Nepal from very early times. As a manifestation of Durga, her worship is overwhelmingly popular in Nepal. To most Nepalese, she is represented as the embodiment of *sakti*. During the great festival of Dassain, which falls in the month of October, thousands of animals are sacrificed in her name. This is observed not only in the valley of Kathmandu but also in villages and towns. Thus she is worshipped as Durga Bhavani throughout the kingdom.

One of the earliest and most striking images of Mahisamardini, belonging to the early group of sculptures, was recently discovered at Dhana Ganesa temple, Hadigaon (Pl. 59). It is diminutive in size, as are most of the early images, and is to be found in a niche of the temple wall. The image is comparatively less mutilated than other early images but time has ravaged most of its details. Nevertheless, a quick glance reveals its identity. In it, the goddess is right behind the demon and with her right rear hand she is striking the enemy on the back with a powerful spear, while her left rear hand is holding a shield at the level of her head. The right front hand seems to be lifting or perhaps pressing the beast on the neck, whereas her left front hand appears to be gripping the muzzle of the animal with such force that it is twisted upwards. The force is very well accentuated on the four legs and curling tail of the animal which seems to be enduring the deadly blow of the goddess.

The goddess is wearing heavy earrings and perhaps a necklace also, but its details are completely obliterated. A scarf hangs conspicuously from her left shoulder and falls diagonally below her navel. Her hair-style is similar to Gaja-Laksmi of Naihiti, the Mother Goddess of Kotaltol and Hariti of Balaju (Pls. 7, 15, 55). The only difference is in the position of her head, which is turned slightly to the left and therefore the tresses on the left are partly visible.

In the valley of Kathmandu there does not seem to be another example of Mahisamardini with similar iconographic traits. At least to the knowledge of the author, no image of Mahisamardini Durga, assignable to the Licchavi period, with the exception of an epigraphical record of Palanchok Bhagavati, has

[1] J.N. Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, (2nd ed.), Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1956, p. 166.

yet come to light. However, there is one in Patan, datable to the late Thakuri period (Pl.62), which may be used here for comparative study. A number of images of Mahisamardini Durga are found in the valley but most of them are works of a later period.

The lower part of the Mahisamardini Durga from Patan being damaged, a detailed study of the image is not possible. The slim and attenuated figure of the goddess, with her right foot firmly planted on the ground and the left foot trampling the head of the demon, clearly suggest a movement of dynamic force and aggression towards her enemy.

The details of her face are eroded but one can visualise the well-built body of the goodess, with firm breasts and expansive hips. Her left front hand is holding a bow and one of the rear left hands is lifting the animal by its tail while the upper rear hand holds a trident. Her mutilated front right hand seems to be holding an arrow, while one rear left hand is brandishing a sword, and the upper rear hand holds an object like a hammer. As the lower portion of the image has been damaged, it is difficult to ascertain whether she is killing Canda and Munda, two demon brothers. A small figure on the lower right is brandishing a sword.

Stylistically and iconographically there seems to be a basic difference between this and the goddess from Hadigaon (Pl.59). In the Patan image it is manifestly clear that sheer physical strength is being used, whereas the Hadigaon image bears the distinct archaic traits and mannerisms of early sculptures of the Mathura school.

Among the early sculptures of Nepal, the image of Mahisamardini from Hadigaon may be the sole example where the goddess is shown in this iconographical form (Pl. 59). On the other hand, she has frequently been rendered in Mathura art in a very similar way. The goddess Mahisamardini from the Mathura Museum (Pl. 60) is depicted by the Mathura sculptor in a fighting scene in an identical manner. For instance, the goddess is standing behind the beast; her left hand is holding him by the neck while her right hand seems to be lifting the animal. Although her rear hands are not visible, a trident and a spear are seen behind the goddess, suggesting the existence of two rear hands. It is interesting to note that the demon appears completely helpless in her powerful grip. The neck of the animal is turned upwards and its tail vainly strikes the right hand of the goddess. The two front legs of the beast are awkwardly dangling while one of its hind legs is trying to trample the right foot of the goddess. Needless to say, the characteristics of the goddess' face, her prominent breasts and heavy anklets are typical of early Mathura-Kushana art.

We may take another example from the Mathura Museum (Pl. 61) which appears to have still closer affinity with our Mahisamardini of Hadigaon. Here the goddess is standing behind the buffalo demon and holding the chin of the animal with her left hand, while her right hand is placed on its back in a similar manner to that of our Mahisamardini. The demon is attacked by a lion from behind. In both images the neck of the demon is twisted upwards.

By comparing the Hadigaon Mahisamardini and those of the Mathura Museum one sees the influence of the Mathura school on Nepalese sculpture. In both examples the basic composition seems to have been derived from a common motif. This is the earliest symbolic convention where the goddess Mahisamardini shows no emotion or tension of mortal combat. The goddess remains calm, placid and restful, in harmony with the universe. The sculptors of Mathura, as well as of Nepal, have been able to delineate the symbolic form of the goddess in a simple plastic rhythm. It is noteworthy how the Nepalese sculptor has created the serene physical presence of the goddess in contrast to the ugly and wrathful buffalo demon. The motherly expression of the goddess is the most significant aspect of the whole sculpture. Only a master sculptor can portray the Divine Mother's metaphoric tenderness, as in our Mahisamardini of Hadigaon. On the basis of such a stylistic evolution, I am inclined to assign the image of Mahisamardini to the late 3rd century A.D.

Chaturmurti

Our survey of the early icons of the valley of Kathmandu indicates that the sculptural representation of Siva, Vishnu and Brahma and other lesser divinities in anthropomorphic form seems to have been in vogue most probably from the 2nd or 3rd centuries A.D. A close study of recently discovered images in the valley shows that certain common motifs which are so characteristic of the early art of India, particularly the Mathura school, are also found in a number of early images of Nepal. The study of such motifs or icons in early Nepalese images, which must have been borrowed from India, will certainly help us not only to explore the inter-relationship between the arts of the two regions, but also to formulate a reliable chronological framework for dating those early sculptures.

One of the most striking images of an unknown Nepalese sculptor is the Chaturmurti located in the courtyard of Rastriya Nachghar (Pl. 63). About two decades ago the image in question was removed from Tindhara-Paksala, hardly five minutes away from the present location, and ever since it has been lying in the open.

So far, this is the first example in Nepalese art in which one finds the Brahmanical triad with *sakti*. To my knowledge, no such parallel exists in India. It is a four-fold image with Brahma facing the front (Pl. 63) and on his right is Siva (Pl. 64), while on the right of Siva is Vishnu (Pl. 65). Between Vishnu and Brahma is Sakti (Pl.66). All four divinities stand facing front on a large *jalahari* or base. The sculpture is fully carved in the round. It was most probably circumambulated by devotees.

The entire piece is carved out of a single sandstone block and it is one of the most dynamic and monumental works of religious art in Nepal. It is the creation of a great master whose wielding of the chisel on a huge block of stone has been carried out with great skill, confidence and deep religious perception. Whoever the sculptor might have been, he has left a great piece of religious art that was never repeated again with the same zeal and skill. Sadly, however, the sculpture is now in a damaged state, suffering mainly from erosion through exposure to frost, rain and sun.

Although Brahma is a member of the Brahmanical triad, in this case he is shown as the figure-head of the group. He was among the numerous gods and goddesses carved during the early Kushana period. Sometimes he has four faces, as did the images of Brahma belonging to the Mathura-Kushana period. "Images of Brahma were also worshipped in the Gupta period and continued in the medieval period. Later on during the Muslim period the worship of Brahma gradually went out of fashion and the belief developed that he had been ousted from the religious orbit due to an alleged utterance of a lie."[1] When the cult of Siva and Vishnu, as two great religious symbols, rose to a great dominating height, the cult of Brahma practically fell into oblivion. "But at one time his worship was extended from the Himalaya to the far south where his images have been found."[2]

Besides the Brahma of the Rastriya Nachghar, there are two remarkable images belonging

[1] V.S. Agrawala, *Indian Art, op. cit.*, p. 254.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 255.

to the Licchavi period in the valley. One is from Chapagaon, about four miles south of Patan, which bears an inscription. On palaeographical grounds this image may be assigned to the 6th century A.D. The other Brahma is from Deo Patan[1] and stylistically both images have a close affinity and belong to the same period. These images have only two hands.

Let us also refer to two other Brahmas of later dates. One is found at a small stone shrine in the courtyard of Pasupatinath temple and the other is at the wall of the stone steps leading to Mrigasthali, across the Bagmati river. These images are represented with four hands and are carved in high relief. Evidently they belong to the Thakuri or early Malla period. Pal has discussed only three Brahma images from Nepal, but seven images of Brahma have so far been found, including the ones from Rastriya Nachghar, Sankhu and also Simraungarh, now housed at the National Museum, Kathmandu.

The Brahma from Rastriya Nachghar is facing the front and is standing erect in *samabhanga* pose with his feet slightly apart on a large full-blown lotus (Pl. 63). Brahma often has four heads which stand for the old cult of four quarters. Here he is seen standing with three heads; his rear head is not visible but is understood. The heads of Brahma, of which the hair should be in matted locks, are damaged; the detail of the faces is also abraded.

He wears a dhoti, a single-beaded necklace, bangles and ear ornaments in his pierced ears. A diagonal sash is looped across the thighs and the ends are hanging on either side, forming decorative folds. He is two-handed and his elbows are characteristically drawn inwards as if to display his majestic splendour. His right hand is holding a rosary and the left hand, *amrita-kamandalu*, a nectar flask. This image may be the earliest Brahma image in Nepal.

The massive treatment of the chest, the broad shoulders, the retracted elbows and the pattern of lotus petals on which he is standing are reminiscent of the early image from Mathura. The absence of *yajnopavita*, the sacred thread, is quite conspicuous in this as in other early images. It is undoubtedly one of the most distinctive features of the early images from Nepal.

On the left side of Brahma is a figure of Siva who is also standing erect on a small dais in *samabhanga* pose (Pl. 64). He is depicted with an erect phallus. There are four arms, and his front elbows are slightly retracted like those of Brahma (Pl. 63). He is wearing heavy earrings, a necklace, bracelets and a sort of garment like a *pitambara* which stops short at his knees (Fig. 52). Although this type of dhoti is rarely seen in the images of the Kushana period, a positive example may be cited in the image of Siva from Musanagar, India. The style of such a garment has never been found in the images of the Licchavi period. Furthermore, the central folds of the dhoti are neatly arranged in a zigzag pattern. A diagonal sash lies over his thighs, of which the remaining ends are hanging on either side with decorative folds at the ends. His left front hand is holding a water-pot and the right front hand is held in *varadamudra* in an awkward manner. The rear hands are damaged, and although hardly distinguishable, the right rear hand seems to be holding a rosary and the left rear hand a trident, the main attributes of Siva.

The third figure on the right of Siva is Vishnu who is standing erect on a small dais with his feet slightly apart (Pl. 65). He is four-handed and his massive arms are conspicuously displayed. Of the group this image is most eroded and the face, arms and front parts are all damaged. He is wearing earrings, a necklace and a dhoti similar to those of Brahma (Pl. 63). Vishnu seems to be holding a conch in his left front hand, while his right front hand appears to be in *varadamudra*, but it is not very clear. In his damaged rear right hand, he is holding a wheel and the left rear hand has a mace with an unusual type of handle. Unlike the mace of the Licchavi period which Vishnu usually holds, the handle of this one is carved differently. There is an image of Vasudeva in the Patna Museum belonging to the 1st century A.D. in which the god is holding a similar type of mace in his left hand. A mace of this type is not used again in any Vishnu image of the Licchavi period.

The last one of the group is a female figure who is Sakti (Pl. 66). Unquestionably this is a unique figure of a female divinity. In Nepal, as in India, the sculptors have treated the female figure with great sensitivity. Although there might be limitations in the iconographical form, yet the artists have never lost sight of giving physical beauty to the female body. Firm breasts, expansive hips, gentle arms, well-shaped legs and a tender smile on her face are the conceptual themes of the artists. It must be remembered, however, that most of the female sculptures in Nepal are endowed with motherly charm and grace rather than youthful vigour.

[1] P. Pal, *op cit.*, figs. 11, 24.

Like the other main divinities, Sakti is standing in *samabhanga* pose on a small dais. She is wearing earrings, a necklace, anklets and a garment reaching down to the anklets. The centre folds of the garment are gathered between the legs and the decorative folds are shown at the end. Her hair-style is like that of Gaja-Laksmi of Naihiti or the Mother Goddess of Kotaltol (Pls. 7, 15). She is holding a mirror in her left hand and her right hand is in *varadamudra* in an awkward manner showing the palm turned outward, an ubiquitous feature of the early images. Her round and fleshy arms are spread out and her breasts are thrust slightly outward, showing the dignity and graceful stance of a Mother Goddess. The female divinity, grouped together with Brahma, Siva and Vishnu, may be the earliest image of Sakti in Nepal.

Stylistically she is very close to Parvati from the Ganesa temple, Kirtipur (Pl. 103), rather than the female figures belonging to the Licchavi or Thakuri periods. A close parallel may be found with the figure of Ekanamsa from Patna Museum which is assigned to the 1st century A.D.(Pl. 67). The hieratic traits, style and proportion of these female figures are very similar. Thus, in view of the ancient motifs and early features found in this Brahmanical triad from Rastriya Nachghar, we may safely attribute them to the late 3rd century A.D.

Another example of Chaturmurti belonging to the 8th or 9th centuries is that from Epatol, Sankhu, a small town about 12 miles east of Kathmandu (Pl. 68). Siva is depicted in his *urdhvareta* aspect, while Vishnu has his usual attributes—*sankha, chakra* and *gada.* Between Siva and Vishnu stands Ardhanarisvara. Prior to this example no image of Ardhanarisvara was known in Nepal. Furthermore, Brahma has only one head. All four divinities are grouped around a huge cylindrical shaft representing *linga* and stand on a large *chatuskona jalahari*, a quadrangle base.

Naga

The worship of Naga, the snake, was widely prevalent in Nepal as in India, and has played a significant role in the history of Nepalese art and religion. As already pointed out, the worship of trees, spirits, mountains, snakes, rivers and dead ancestors dates from the remote past of non-Aryan origin. Even today many aboriginals or tribal groups in India as well as people living in some remote hill areas in Nepal, cling tenaciously to these old and primitive beliefs. V.S. Agrawala has aptly remarked that the worship of Naga has come down from the Austric tribes or the original settlers.[1] This shows that the cult of Naga worship is older than the Yaksha cult. Owing to its peculiar shape and mysterious gliding movement without legs, the snake has been a creature of fascination, easily able to inflame the primitive mind.

Through the ages, artists in many countries have incorporated the art-motif of the serpent, for example in the plastic arts of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Syria, Greece and Crete. In early Sumerian cylinder seals (3500-3000 B.C.), two copulating vipers were depicted as a symbol of generative force.[2] The Sumerian god of healing was represented as a pair of intertwined snakes. The antiquity of the Naga cult is further emphasized by the discovery of Naga effigies in the seals of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, the two main centres of the Indus Valley civilization. Thus, worship of the serpent dates from pre-Vedic times, and widely influenced the faith of the people. Banerjea has also said, "As in the case of Yaksha and Yakshinis, the Nagas were of the most common folk divinities."[3]

The Puranas and the epics provide us with a long list of Nagas of which the principal ones include Sesa, Vasuki, Taksaka and Karakotaka. Mathura, which was associated with the cult of Vasudeva-Krishna, was one of the ancient centres of Naga worship. This is attested to by the discovery of hundreds of Naga images in Mathura art from the Sunga period to the Gupta period (2nd century B.C. to 6th century A.D.). In addition Balarama, the younger brother of Krishna, is conceived of as an incarnation of the cosmic serpent, Ananta, as evidenced by numerous sculptures found among Mathura art. It will be recalled that the childhood of Krishna was associated with the ferocious Kaliya-Naga who poisoned the water of the Yamuna, causing death and destruction, and who was later quelled by the child Krishna.

In Buddhist art, the Naga plays an equally important role. There are numerous Naga motifs in the art of Bharhut and Sanchi, among other places. The *jataka* scenes also throw interesting light on the cult of the Naga. As soon as Buddha was born, he was worshipped by the two Nagas, Nanda and Upananda. Another story tells of Nagaraja Muchalinda who came out of his hole and made a canopy of his hood over the head of Buddha to protect him from rain and storm.

The Naga motif is also frequently used in Jain art. The sculptural evidence shows that Tirthankara Parsvanatha is protected by a canopy of Naga hoods. Thus the wide popularity of the Naga cult has been reflected often in Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain art.

The tradition of Naga *puja* (serpent worship) prevails even today, both in India and Nepal,

[1] V.S. Agrawala, *Ancient Indian Folk Cults, op. cit.*, p. 110.

[2] K. Bharata Iyer, "The Naga in Art and Lore," Bombay, *The Times of India Annual*, 1970, p. 71.

[3] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

where the Naga Panchami festival is observed in the month of Sravana (August) throughout the country. On this day Naga deities and snakes receive special veneration.

In Nepal, there are numerous legends relating to Nagas, in fact, the very origin of Kathmandu valley is associated with them. Hence it is not difficult to explain why Naga worship has been so popular among the people of the valley. In spite of this, one finds very few Naga sculptures belonging to the early group, but there are numerous Naga images of a later period, and these are represented both anthropomorphically and zoomorphically.

Let us refer to only two of the ancient images, one of which is at the Kumbhesvara temple precinct, Patan, and the other at the Archaeological Garden in Patan. First let us discuss the image of Vasuki from Kumbhesvara temple (Pl. 69). Vasuki is seated in *lalitasana* pose on the coils of a huge serpent whose hoods form a canopy around the head of the deity. Although details of his crown are obliterated, other ornaments consist of large earrings, a broad necklace and bracelets. He is clad in a dhoti, the central folds of which are brought forward under his left leg, and whose pleats are gathered into a beautiful decorative fold as seen in a number of the early sculptures of Divine Mothers. A four-fold sash is loosely attached across the abdomen, while one of the ends is brought over the left shoulder as an additional scarf, as observed in the *matrika* images of Nepal or in the Mathura art of the Kushana period. However, this style does not seem to have been pursued from the 5th century onwards.

Here, Vasuki is holding a full blown lotus in his left hand. Worthy of note is the style of carving of the lotus which is identical to that on which the Brahma of Rastriya Nachghar stands (Pl. 63). This stylistic unity is an early feature, for no lotus of this kind is found in later images. Another remarkable feature of this image is that the right hand of the deity is held in *varadamudra* with a cupped palm, an ubiquitous feature of early sculpture noted earlier. However, a closer observation reveals that the carving is very refined, in contrast to that of the early Mother Goddesses or of the Hadigaon Vishnu (Pl. 119). Vasuki has a broad masculine chest and massive arms in deeply carved relief. A hole in his forehead was once decorated with a jewel or precious stone as a symbol of the king of serpents. Other peculiar features in this image include the large broad forehead, high cheek-bones and slightly protruding, full lips (Pl. 70). Nevertheless, it is a very well-proportioned and imposing sculpture whose monumental treatment is noteworthy. Observe that the manner of treatment is somewhat flat yet minute details are carefully executed. The toes of Vasuki are remarkably similar to those of Hariti of Balaju (Pl. 55), indicating workmanship of the same atelier. The artists of Nepal have always shown remarkable talent in depicting Nagas, in particular the intertwining coils which are powerful yet full of rhythmic movement. Vasuki is seated on the coils of a Naga, a harmonious and befitting setting for his royal bearing.

A comparison of this Vasuki image can be made with the Nagaraja of Hadigaon (Pl. 71). Although the latter is a work of the medieval period and details are obliterated, the iconographic traits and composition seen in the Kumbhesvara Vasuki (Pl. 69) seem to persist here. For example, the hoods of the serpent form a canopy as seen in the Kumbhesvara Vasuki and the deity is sitting in a similar manner, in *lalitasana*, holding a lotus in his left hand, with the right hand held in *varadamudra*. The only differences are the addition of the sun and the moon above the canopy of the serpent and two attendants who are sitting on either side at the bottom of the relief (Pl. 71). These indicate workmanship of a later date.

An example of Nagaraja (Pl. 75) may be cited here from Pachalibhairava. He is seated in *lalitasana* on the coil of a serpent but the traits of the figure and the style of the carving are far different from those of the Kumbhesvara Vasuki.

Another example of a Nagaraja from Naksal (Pl. 72) may be used for brief comparison. Although this image belongs to the late 12th or early 13th centuries, it shows similar iconographic traits as well as composition, with a very slight variation. Besides the sun and moon, a *chhatra* (parasol) on the top centre is a new addition, a motif frequently used in the Uma-Mahesvara panel of a later period. Unlike the lotus of the Kumbhesvara Vasuki (Pl. 69), here the deity is holding a *nilakamala* in his left hand and a boss in his right. The powerful intertwining coils of the early Vasuki have now been changed into a simple coil upon which the Nagaraja is sitting.

This brief comparison enables us to trace the evolution of Naga sculpture during a span of nearly one thousand years. Although stylistic ditterences are evident, the basic concept of form is more or less the same as the early sculpture of Naga from Kumbhesvara. Hence, on stylistic grounds we may assign this image of Kumbhesvara to the 4th century A.D.

The second Naga sculpture is the torso of Nagaraja from the Archaeological Garden, Patan, (Pl. 73). Unlike the Vasuki of Kumbhesvara, Nagaraja is seated cross-legged in yogic position. Since the deity is sitting on the coil of the serpent, the figure may unmistakably be identified as Nagaraja. He is two-armed and both are entirely damaged, hence positive identification of the attributes of his hands is out of the question. His ornaments consist of large earrings of an unusual type, an ornamental necklace and broad armlets. He is wearing a dhoti in a peculiar fashion, for it is not resured by a girdle as seen in other sculptures, but rolled and tucked around the waist. It must also be noted that there are no central folds of the dhoti but a broad, semi-circular fold drawn right across the abdomen. Curiously the dhoti of Yaksha from Hadigaon, now at the National Museum (Pl. 1), has been similarly carved but it is well secured by a broad belt.

The monumentality of the image may easily be viewed not only from the front but also from the side and back (Pl. 74). The powerful modelling and treatment are indeed like the early Naga images from Mathura. On the back of the sculpture, a serpent is springing from the coil, suggesting a canopy of Naga hoods over the head of Nagaraja. The entire sculpture must have looked striking as numbers of devotees circumambulated the Naga deity paying homage with votive offerings.

For dating this image, we have to examine it carefully before reaching our conclusion. Pal has claimed "its being a work of Licchavi tradition,"[1] and suggested a 6th century date. However, it must be pointed out that it is not only an unusual type of sculpture which has no stylistic affinity with the Licchavi images, particularly 6th century ones, but is also unparalleled in Nepal as far as Naga sculpture is concerned. No Naga icons of this type have been found in the valley. A close study of these images will reveal the hieratic tradition of early sculpture as seen in Mathura art of the late Kushana period. The simplicity of modelling, the carving of the coils of the serpent and the diagonally incised lines on the folds of the garment (Pl. 74) indicate an early type of sculpture. Considering these features, I would assign it to the late 4th century A.D.

[1] P. Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

Kubera

Kubera, the king of the Yaksha, who is also regarded as the lord of riches and the guardian deity of the northern region has played no small role in the art of Nepal and India. He is given the title of Nidhipati or Dhanalati. In his *Mahabhasya*, Patanjali made several references to Kubera. Kalidasa also alluded to him as a king of Yakshas. His abode is said to be in the Himalayas.

Numerous representations of Kubera are found in Indian art and one of the earliest examples is on the pillar of Bharhut, datable to the 2nd century B.C. Here, Kubera is shown standing with both hands clasped in the *namaskaramudra*, while his feet are resting on the shoulders of the malformed body of a corpulent Yaksha. The positive identification of the deity is evidenced by the inscription "Kupiro Yakho" (Kubera Yaksha).

In Mathura art, Kubera may be represented alone (Pls. 77, 78) or with Hariti (Pl. 56), or sometimes with both Laksmi and Hariti (Pl. 58). It must be noted that, like Skanda, he is associated with Mother Goddesses. The figure of Kubera is invariably carved as a two-handed deity holding a wine cup in his left hand, while the right is held in *abhayamudra*. Such iconographic traits are commonly found in Mathura-Kushana art.

In Nepal, only one ancient image of Kubera has so far come to light, but there are numerous images of the deity in metal sculpture which belong to a later period. A very interesting image of Kubera is located in the precinct of the Satya Narayana temple in Hadigaon (Pl. 76). Like most of the Kubera images in Mathura art, the figure of Kubera is of diminutive size. He is sitting in *sukhasana* with his right leg resting on the seat and his left leg folded, supporting his left arm. The two-armed deity has broad and massive shoulders. He holds a purse or money bag in his left hand, while the object in his right hand is not distinguishable due to abrasion. He is described as an obese figure in various texts and indeed he is represented here as a pot-bellied deity. The portliness which is characteristic of this deity is evidenced by the manner in which he is sitting. Details of his face are lost but he wears large earrings, a necklace and bracelets. There is a large plain halo behind his head. He is adorned with lovely wig-shaped curls and locks of hair similar to that of the Seated Surya of Aryaghat (Pl. 86). In fact the mannerisms and style of modelling as a whole are close to the Seated Surya and the possibility of a contemporary work from the same workshop cannot be ruled out.

An interesting figure of Kubera, now housed in the Mathura Museum (Pl. 77), is also worthy of discussion. The headless deity is sitting in *sukhasana* pose, holding a purse in his left hand while the object in his right hand is difficult to establish due to abrasion. Another image of Kubera from Mathura (Pl. 78) may also be cited here for a brief comparison. The head of the deity is damaged; he is sitting in a fashion similar to the one referred to above. His left hand is placed on the thigh, while his right hand is raised holding a purse. These two images are of diminutive size like most of the early folk divinities of the Mathura-Kushana school. It is interesting to know that the Kubera image from Hadigaon is not only diminutive in size, but also has some of the traits and iconography of the Kushana tradition. In the light of this we can surmise that the image of Kubera from Hadigaon belongs to the 4th century A.D.

In Nepal, no other image of Kubera belonging to the early centuries of the Christian era or the Licchavi period, has come to light. However, there is one image at Thahiti, Kathmandu, belonging to the late Malla period, which is close to the Buddhist Jambala, for the deity is holding a citron in his right hand and a mongoose in his left.

Four Unidentified Sculptures

Among the earliest images of Nepal, a few still remain unidentified. We shall now refer to four such images which have raised controversies among scholars, none of whom has been able convincingly to establish their identity. The first such image is to be found at the Kumbhesvara temple compound, Patan, (Pl. 81).

It is indeed curious that the average religious Nepalese are but little concerned about the proper identification of their gods and goddesses, hence a number of divinities are worshipped in mistaken guise. For instance, the image in the Kumbhesvara temple compound (Pl. 81) is worshipped as Sitala-Ajima, goddess of smallpox, but the main divinity is definitely a male figure, worshipped in the guise of another. He is flanked by two devotees, a male on the right and a female on the left. There are altogether six subordinate figures which are carved at the front, the sides, and at the rear. This image, so well-known in Patan as Sitala-Ajima, is one of the most revered deities, drawing streams of devotees every day.

Why and when this image began to be worshipped as Sitala-Ajima is a matter for conjecture. One answer may well be that when it was recovered from the nearby tank, as recorded in the *vamsavali*, it may then have been wrongly identified as Sitala and, as a result, begun to be worshipped as the presiding deity of smallpox. There is a common belief among Newars that Ajima has six sisters. Therefore, the presence of six subordinate figures around the main deity may also have led some devotees to call it Sitala-Ajima. But how the male divinity was identified as a female figure remains a mystery. Nevertheless, once it was accepted as a female deity no one bothered to identify this object of popular devotion, and the tradition has continued to this day.

There is an epigraphical record, dated Nepal Samvat 512, corresponding to A.D. 1392, that during the reign of Sthitimalla, "a two storied temple was built, the tank near Kumbhesvara temple was cleaned, and eight stone images of Narayana, Ganesa, Sitala, Vasuki, Gauri, Sanda (Skanda?), Kirtimukha and Agama Devata"[1] were recovered from the tank and installed at various places. The epigraphical evidence seems to be correct but the identification of the images is doubtful. Of the images mentioned in the inscription, only five—Vasuki, Ganesa, Gauri, Sitala (misidentified) and Vishnu—are still found in the temple precinct.

To my knowledge only two scholars so far have attempted to identify the so-called Sitala image (Pl. 81). In his recently published book, *The Arts of Nepal, Pt. I,* Pal has discussed this sculpture and tried to establish its identity. He has surmised that this figure could "be a Bodhisattva, or Surya the sun god, or Visnu".[2] Even assuming, however, that it is a figure of Vishnu, as he suggests later on, the image should be four-handed. In this image we fail to see four hands and Vishnu's attributes such as *gada* (mace), *chakra* (wheel) and *sankha* (conch), and therefore the argument of Pal is unconvincing. A two-handed Vishnu is

[1] D. Wright, *History of Nepal*, (3rd Indian ed), Calcutta, 1966, p. 124. The event which has been recorded on a stone inscription was wrongly dated in the *vamsavali* as Nepal Samvat 542 (A.D. 1422). The correct date of the inscription is Nepal Samvat 512 (A.D. 1392) corresponding to the reign of Sthitimalla, A.D. 1382-1395.

[2] P. Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

extremely rare in India, and only a few examples have so far come to light; in Nepal, there is only one example, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

Ślusser suggested in her paper that this figure could possibly be identified as Pancika, consort of Hariti and "himself a converted Yaksa and also protector of children".[1] It must, however, be remembered that in Gandhara art, figures of Hariti and Pancika have been well identified, and in Mathura art Hariti is more often associated with the cult of Kubera and is frequently represented as his wife (Pls. 56, 58). No composite figure of Hariti and Pancika similar to this one has so far been discovered. Moreover, it should be recalled that it is Hariti and not Pancika who should be surrounded by the children. Also, here we know for certain that the subordinate figures are all adults and not children. Therefore, to identify this figure as Pancika seems unacceptable. For its proper identification, something more than a superficial study is needed. With a careful examination of every detail, let us see if there is anything we can point to which others may have failed to observe.

Like other early sculptures, the stele is badly abraded and the upper right side is partly broken (Pl. 81). The figure, undoubtedly male, is standing erect, in *samabhanga*, with his feet slightly apart. He is wearing heavy earrings, a large necklace and bangles. A sash is looped diagonally across the thighs and the loose part is hanging on the right with decorative folds at the end, a feature common to the early sculptures of Nepal. The other part of the sash is draped around his left shoulder and looks like an additional scarf. In his right hand he is holding a full blown lotus, while his left is placed behind the small slender limping female figure. It should be observed that the style of dhoti which stops short at the knees, is marked with folds of creases, and the central folds of the garment are neatly arranged in a zigzag pattern which is identical to that of Siva of Rastriya Nachghar (Pl. 64) and Hari-Hara of Saugal, Patan (Pl. 147).

Now, let us turn to the obese male figure on his right, who could be a devotee making offerings to the main divinity on his left. He is standing erect and is turned slightly towards the main deity. Although his face is partly mutilated he is wearing a necklace, heavy earrings and a dhoti similar to the main figure, except that the top folds of the dhoti are gathered up under his left arm like a priest. His hair is pulled up and gathered into a bun. With both hands he is holding a small basket which seems to contain flowers, apparently as an offering to the main deity; therefore it does not look like "the obese male receiving something in the palms of his hands" from the main divinity, as described by Pal,[2] for the main figure himself is already holding a full blown lotus in his right hand.

On the left side of the deity is a female figure, whose presence is puzzling and raises more problems than can be solved. The fact that she is not standing erect like other female deities makes her function more difficult to establish. Her head is broken, but she seems to be wearing a long skirt reaching down to the ankles. She appears to have been standing with bended knees and her thin and frail body is slightly stooped forward as though she were a sick devotee approaching the divinity. This is attested to by the fact that right behind her is the gentle hand of the main divinity who seems to be helping the sick devotee. In her feeble right hand, she holds a branch of an Asoka tree with leaves which are clearly visible, but a fruit-like round object at the end of the branch is not clear (Fig. 58). Whatever may be the object, the motif seems to have been borrowed from carvings of women and trees found on the gateways and railings of Bharhut, Sanchi and Mathura.[3] The Yakshi figures are often shown holding a branch of a tree under which they stand (Fig. 56). A similar motif, almost identical, may be cited from a Yakshi figure standing under an Asoka tree (Fig. 57). This is another of the examples of how some of the ancient Indian motifs are used in the early images of Nepal. This is not an accidental or stray example, for a number of other ancient Indian motifs occur in early Nepalese sculptures. It should be noted that there are no such motifs among the images of the Licchavi or the Thakuri period.

Next, let us turn to the right of the main image where a small male figure is standing with feet close together (Pl. 83). He is wearing a turban-like headdress with a circular centre , a motif which seems to have been derived from Mathura-Kushana art. His earrings are large, similar to those of the main divinity (Pl. 81). He wears a necklace consisting of beads with a large one in the centre. His dhoti stops short at his knees and its folds are marked with creases. His right hand is held in the position of *varadamudra* in

[1] M. Slusser, *op. cit.*, p. 102

[2] P. Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 41

[3] A similar motif is seen in the Yakshi figure from Mathura who is holding a fruit and a branch of leaves in her left hand. See P. Pal, "Indo-Asian Art", The John Gilmore Ford Collection (pl. 1).

the same awkward manner, while his left hand is holding a hanging scarf.

Another figure standing to the left of the main divinity is a female figure, who could be another devotee (Pl. 84). She stands erect and wears a long skirt. Her necklace, bangles and earrings are similar to other figures on the same stele. A diagonal sash, another usual feature of early sculptures, is seen draped across her thighs. She holds her right hand in *varadamudra* in an awkward manner. Her left hand appears to be carrying flowers in a small jar to offer to the main deity. The modelling of the round face and the hair-style are strongly reminiscent of Vaisnavi from Kirtipur (Pl. 37). Another remarkable feature is the delineation of a slender waist against the rather disproportionately broad, expansive hips. The small breasts, which look as though they have been grafted, remind us very much of the Mother Goddess from Haugal-Bahal, Patan (Pl. 19). Being so stylistically close, one wonders whether these works were the products of the same workshop.

Above her head is a small figure sitting in *lalitasana* pose, with his right leg resting on the seat and the left pendant. He wears a dhoti and earrings, the style of which is similar to the other figures. He holds his right hand in *varadamudra* while the left hand is missing.

Special mention must be made of the last female figure carved in very low relief on the back of the stele (Fig. 53). Being hidden behind the stele and only about thirty inches away from the wall, she is hardly noticed. She stands firmly erect with her feet slightly apart; she is wearing a necklace, heavy earrings and a long skirt reaching down to the ankles, with the central folds arranged in decorative pleats. A diagonal sash is looped across the thighs and her left hand is holding the remaining part of the sash. The head is partly damaged but a close study reveals that stylistically it is similar to the female figure to the left of the main divinity (Pl. 84). The rear image is, therefore, the work of the same artist. In view of this it is difficult to agree with Slusser that it was carved at a later time.[1]

From the above discussion we now know for certain that this is a four-fold image of the *sarbhatovadrika* type and the principal deity is holding a full blown lotus in his right hand. The delineation of the lotus is similar to the one held by goddess Mahesvari from Kirtipur (Pl. 43). Here, it must be recalled that the lotus has been used in the plastic arts of India as a symbol of the sun from very ancient times. The predominance of the lotus motif is quite clear on this image. Since the main divinity has a full blown lotus in his right hand he could be identified as Surya, the sun god.

We have yet to notice one of the most significant features in this image. There is the huge circular patch on the left and above the shoulder of the main divinity (Pl. 82). Although partly broken, it is conspicuously visible and looks like a disc. But closer study reveals that it is no other than a large full blown lotus with petals whose details are lost so that it resembles a disc. One can easily imagine that a similar lotus could have been carved on the right side also but this part is broken. Now a question naturally arises, why has the large full blown lotus been produced here and what does it signify? Surely the sculptor had something in mind. We know that the lotus symbolizes the sun as a creative force. In the early coins of India the symbol of the sun was always a lotus. In Indian art the sun has been symbolically represented as a golden disc, a wheel or a lotus flower. Therefore, the lotus has great significance and is closely associated with the sun in the image of Kumbhesvara. This lotus is so prominent that the image must be identified as a Solar Divinity, for the cult of Surya had prevailed for centuries in India and Nepal.

J.N. Banerjea, probing the meaning of the lotus motif, says, "The lotus was intimately connected with the sun from very ancient times; it played a conspicuous part in the mythology of Brahmanism, and its association with the sun is fully borne out by the evidence of the Puranas which enjoin the execution in sculpture of a twelve-petalled lotus, on different petals of which figures of the different aspects of the sun god are to be placed with the god Bhaskara on the central pericarp (*karnika*). The lotus symbolising the sun and the creative force (Surya is Savitr—*survasya prasavitr*, the producer of all) came to hold a unique place in Indian art of all religious creeds."[2]

The main divinity under discussion is holding a full blown lotus in his right hand. As seen in this relief, the right part is completely mutilated and only a large lotus depicted on the left is clearly visible (Pl. 82). It is most likely that a large full blown lotus was represented on the right also. In this case, the main deity can be identified as a Solar Divinity.

The earliest epigraphical record of sun-worship in Nepal is found at Tehbahal,

[1] M. Slusser, *op. cit.*, p. 105.
[2] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

Kathmandu, dated A.D. 480. The inscription mentions a certain trader named Guhamitra who installed an image of Divakara by the name of Indra. The actual image has since been lost, and only the inscription has survived. There are a number of dated Surya images of late periods such as Surya from Thapahiti, A.D. 1065, Surya from Saugal, A.D. 1083, Surya from Naksal, A.D. 1159, and Surya from Banepa, A.D. 1394.[1] But there are also countless undated images from about the 9th-10th centuries to as late as the 19th century. This will indeed reflect the immense popularity of sun worship in Nepal from ancient times to this day.

As a Solar Divinity, the image differs iconographically from the image of Surya in India, but it must be borne in mind that the Nepalese sculptors sometimes treated images with the definite purpose of meeting the religious demands of the people; this explains their occasional iconographical difference from the Indian tradition. Here, too, the sculptor seems to have delineated the iconography according to the prevailing local traditions and evidently the lotus was conceived of as the symbol representing Surya, the sun god. Such peculiarities are not unknown in Nepal.

The presence of subsidiary figures in this stele is puzzling. They could be devotees of both sexes bringing offerings to the sun god and some could be donors as well. In Nepal there is still a strong religious tendency among people to observe fasts on Sundays for curing diseases by worshipping the sun god. Numerous devotees, both male and female, take holy dips in the Bagmati river, especially during festivals, and offer prayers every morning. The offering of *arghya*, drops of water, held in two palms, is made to the sun god while bathing at a river or at fountains or wells. This is a common sight in Nepal.

Not only in Nepal and India, but also in Egypt, the cult of sun worship was prevalent as early as 2580 B.C. The kings considered themselves descendants of the sun god Ra and erected sun temples for worship. The Assyrians, too, called the sun Shamash and the Greeks, Helios. The Iranian sun god, Mihira or Mithra was symbolized as a solar disc and later assimilated with the ancient symbol of a wheel or disc. Mitra is undoubtedly an Indo-Aryan god and the Vedic Aryans have also referred to the sun as Mitra. In the Vedic and post-Vedic periods, the cult of sun worship continued. The sun is the supreme solar body or visual force, without whose existence the whole universe would be plunged into eternal darkness and disappear, and is regarded as the protector of the world.

Let us now turn to the second image from Mrigasthali, now preserved at the National Museum, Kathmandu (Pl. 85), and the third one found in a small shrine at Aryaghat, on the banks of the river Bagmati below the temple of Pasupatinath (Pl. 86).

The image in the National Museum (Pl. 85) was discovered by Yogi Naraharinath in the early 1960s while digging for the foundation of a shrine at Mrigasthali, the wooded hilly area on the opposite bank of the river Bagmati just above Pasupati. It was Stella Kramrisch who first published a description of it under the title "Statue of King?" in 1964 and assigned it to the 5th century A.D.[2] However, scholars are not unanimous regarding its identification and dating. N.R. Banerjee identified the image as "A Kirati King" and dated it *ca.* 3rd century A.D.[3], while Madanjit Singh described it as the figure of a royal personage and assigned it to *ca.* 4th century A.D.[4]

Further, Waldschmidt has identified it as a "Statue of a Prince or God" and dated it to the 4th or 5th centuries A.D.[5] More recently Pratapaditya Pal has identified it as "Royal Portrait" with a question mark and assigned it to the 4th century A.D.[6] However, earlier he had identified this image as a Solar Divinity, again with a question mark, and assigned it to the 5th century A.D.[7] All the above identifications and dates seem to have been suggested without comprehensive study of the statue itself.

This image is traditionally believed to be the portrait of a Kirata King, Yalambara. As there is no archaeological basis for this assumption, it is perhaps fruitless to discuss this aspect.

While offering arguments, Pal has cited an example of the Kushana imperial portraits.[8] A brief discussion on Kushana emperors, whose kingdom extended from near Central Asia to Kathiawar,

[1] For a detailed study see P. Pal, *op. cit.*, pp. 33 and 142-145, and figs. 28, 29, 34 and 35. The date of fig.35 is perhaps wrongly printed; it should be A.D. 1394 and not 1349.

[2] Stella Kramrisch, *The Art of Nepal*, New York, The Asia Society, Inc., 1964, pl. 1

[3] N.R. Banerjee, *Nepalese Art*, Kathmandu, Department of Archaeology, 1966, pl. X (111/19)

[4] Madanjit Singh, *Himalayan Art*, UNESCO Art Book, New York Graphic Society, 1968, p. 167.

[5] E. and R.L. Waldschmidt, *Nepal, Art Treasures from the Himalayas*, Calcutta, Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., 1969, pl. 9

[6] P. Pal *op. cit.*, fig. 62.

[7] P. Pal and D.C. Bhattacharyya, *The Astral Divinities of Nepal*, Varanasi, Prithivi Prakashan, 1969, pl. 1.

[8] P. Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

west of India, and later as far as Bihar, will show that it is not justifiable for us to compare the tribal people or a segment of an ethnic group who were living in isolation in the valley of Kathmandu, with the imperial Kushanas. The Saka-Kushana emperors obviously adopted the tradition of making royal portraits from the homeland of their ancestors in Central Asia. The Palace Wall of their ancestors was embedded with royal statues. The discovery of inscriptions of the Saka-Kushana emperors and of *Devakula* at Mat, about twelve kilometres from Mathura, has yielded statues of Vema, Kaniska and Saka Satrap Shastana, larger than life-size. This leaves no doubt of an existing institution of *Devakula*—gallery of royal statues. Furthermore, it should be recalled that the Saka-Kushanas were foreigners who ruled northern India from the 1st century B.C. to the 3rd century A.D. During Kushana rule in India, the emperors faithfully adopted their old traditional dress. For example, the statue from Mat of Vema Kadpises shows him seated on a lion throne, dressed in a long-sleeved tunic, heavily folded trousers and thickly padded boots as worn by the Scythians (Fig. 54). Another headless statue of Kaniska, also from Mat, bearing the inscription *Maharaja Rajatiraja Devaputro Kanishko*, has a similar type of Scythian dress (Fig. 55). A brief glance will immediately reveal their identity without any confusion, for their portraiture was known to stress a realistic resemblance to the Kushana emperors. On the contrary, our sculpture under discussion has no such character. His stance and hieratic delineation conforms to a divinity type of image rather than to a royal portrait.

This image can be compared with that of Siva of Balambu (Pl.93), Hari-Hara of Saugal, (Pl.147) and Vishnu of Hadigaon (Pl.119), for he stands erect in *samabhanga* pose as they do. His two feet are missing, but the posture indicates that they are firmly planted on the pedestal and are held slightly apart. One of the significant characteristics of this image are the broad expansive shoulders and the two spreading arms with retracted elbows, significantly reminiscent of the Bodhisattvas of Sarnath and Maholi. He wears a dhoti which is almost diaphanous, secured by a distinctive belt with a simple design in the Kushana mode. His ornaments consist of a triple-pointed crown with a *makara* design in the centre, *amalaka* shaped earrings similar to those of Virupaksha (Pl. 98), and a pair of bangles. With these scanty ornaments the image looks almost bare. Unlike the diagonal sash of other male divinities, a semi-circular sash is looped across the thighs with its ends hanging on either side. Here too, *yajnopavita*, the sacred thread is conspicuously absent as in the other early male figures. He is holding the projecting ends of the sash with his left hand, while his right hand is held in a peculiar manner, neither displayed in *varadamudra* nor holding a boss as described by Pal.[1] Actually the divinity is not holding anything. The Mongoloid physiognomy marked with a rigid expression is apparent in this image, and evidently signifies the native aesthetic sense which was prevailing in the early sculptures of the valley. It is interesting to note that these Mongoloid facial characteristics are absent in the images of the Licchavi or Thakuri period.

The plain halo, like a rising sun, behind the head of the divinity obviously is a dominant feature in this image. It is a distinctive symbol and indicates that the figure is indeed a Solar Divinity.

Although the image seems to have been derived from the Mathura-Kushana tradition, yet the early Gupta influence is traceable in general and in the symmetrical medium loop in particular. Here, we find a gradual change in modelling and iconographical traits, indicating a transition stage of the early sculpture. After a century we come across a more sophisticated art form of the Licchavi period such as that of Tilganga Vishnu-Vikranta of A.D. 467 (Pl. 156), under the impact of the Gupta tradition. Therefore, on stylistic evidence this image could be a work of the late 4th century A.D.

Now we come to the third image found in a small shrine at Aryaghat (Pl. 86). A segment of the Nepalese people believe that the figure is the mother of Virupaksa, based on local legend which is obviously misleading. Although this figure is less abraded, it poses a considerable problem with regard to its proper identification. It has not been well publicised and very few scholars have discussed it.

The figure, wearing a mysterious smile, is seated on a plain dais with his knees spread wide apart and his two strong and solid hands placed on them. In his right hand he is holding a boss and in his left, a lotus bud. He is wearing large earrings similar to those of the Mother Goddess of Hadigaon (Pl. 15), armlets, and a dhoti which stops just below the knees, as in the early male divinities. Unlike the decorative folds of the garment seen in early sculptures, here the central fold of the dhoti is neatly pleated with multiple folds in a more stylized manner. An equally interesting feature in this figure is the treatment of the

[1] P. Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 45

semicircular sash which is twisted like a rope and looped across the thighs. Then the ends of the sash are carried over the arms from where they fall on either side in a simple fold. This may indicate that from the 4th century onwards the decorative folds of the garment, which were the most characteristic feature of early sculpture seem to have been transformed into a sophisticated decorative pattern; by the 5th century A.D., no such motif whatsoever seems to have been depicted. In this figure, we find another peculiar feature in the hair-style which looks like a judge's wig, and is indeed similar to the hairdo of Kubera of Hadigaon (Pl. 76). Basically the figure is treated with a sense of monumentality, epitomizing the character of the Mathura-Kushana mode, and I do not find in it any parallel with the sculpture of the Licchavi period. Stylistically, they are far apart.

Behind the head is an unusual spoked halo, never before depicted either in early images or in the Licchavi period. It must have a more significant meaning than an ordinary halo. In some early tribal coins, we find the spoked wheel which is a common symbol of the sun. J.N. Banerjea writes of it, "the clearest and most significant way of representing the Sun God as a rayed disc enshrined as an object of worship is to be found among the devices of certain tribal coins which can be dated to 200 B.C. to the end of the first century B.C."[1] Writing on the early symbols of the sun, he remarks, "Sun was being represented in Indian art by means of various symbols before the inception and development of any cult centering around him. These symbols were made use of by the Vedic ritualists in the performance of sacrifices. A round wheel, a round golden plate, a lotus flower, etc., were commonly used on these occasions."[2]

The above accounts give us an accurate picture of various symbols representing the sun and, if a spoked halo can be accepted as a symbol of solar iconography, then we have here, an image of Surya, the sun god, with such a halo (Pl. 86). We may cite an example from India, belonging to the 7th-8th centuries A.D., where a similar spoked halo can be seen in a Surya image now housed at Alampur Museum, India (Fig. 59).

While discussing the image, Pal on the one hand calls it a Solar Divinity and on the other asks whether it could possibly be a royal portrait.[3] Referring to the two sculptures found in the Pasupatinath area, including the image found at Mrigasthali (Pl. 85) and the one under discussion, he writes, "It is thus quite probable that in the vicinity of the temple of Pasupatinath there was some sort of a portrait gallery of the early Licchavi monarchs, like that of the Kushanas at Mat near Mathura."[4] We have already drawn a comparison between the imperial Kushanas in India and the early settlers of the valley where, at the most, there could have been only a few feudal lords among the tribal groups. On the other hand, Manadeva was the most illustrious Licchavi king who was the first to leave inscriptions in the valley. If we accept the two early images found at Pasupatinath as the royal portraits of Licchavi monarchs, then Manadeva would surely have followed in the footsteps of his ancestors. But no such royal portrait has so far been discovered. It is thus very unlikely that the Licchavi kings, as early as the 4th century A.D. in the valley of Kathmandu, would have conceived the grand idea of installing their portraits at no other place but the Pasupatinath sanctum. Malla kings of Kathmandu valley have installed their portraits in front of their palaces, like the statue of Bhupatindra Malla of Bhadgaon (A.D. 1696-1722) or the statue of Yognarendra Malla of Patan (A.D. 1685-1705). Furthermore, a king's statue would have been represented as sitting on a throne and not on a simple dais as seen in this image (Pl. 86). Therefore to consider these images royal portraits seems somewhat farfetched.

Our survey has indicated that during the early centuries of the Christian era four principal cults seem to have been flourishing in the valley: (i) Mother cult, (ii) Saiva cult, (iii) Vaisnava cult and (iv) Saura cult. We have already discussed the mother cult of Nepal which was overwhelmingly popular. The Saiva and Vaisnava cults were equally popular, as clearly reflected in the early sculptures of the valley. Along with these the Saura cult also flourished and the worship of Surya has always been very popular, from ancient times to this day.

In the *Rig Veda*, the description of Surya is given as riding on a chariot drawn by one, three, four or seven horses. Probably one of the earliest examples based on this dogma can be seen on the Bodhgaya stone railings where the sun god is seated on a wheeled chariot drawn by four horses. The

[1] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 432.
[3] P. Pal, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Buddhist cave at Bhaja also bears another example, probably the earliest in Indian art. In this relief, Surya is driving through the sky with his attendants and destroying the evil power of darkness. These two reliefs belong to around the 1st and 2nd centuries B.C. respectively.

The reason why our sculptor has depicted the image of the sun god Surya with only such symbols as a large lotus, a plain halo and a spoked nimbus (Pls. 81, 85, 86), remains elusive. It is one of many peculiar iconographical enigmas in the early sculpture of Nepal, for we have already examined a Mongolian type of face in the figure of Mrigasthali (Pl. 85) and an unusual type of hairdo, i.e., the wig type hair-style of the figure from Aryaghat (Pl. 86). These elements reflect the native aesthetic standard as well as local iconographic traditions. This is not due to the relative seclusion of the valley but because of the transitional period in the sculptural art of Nepal in the beginning of the 4th century.

However, later examples of Surya images throughout the valley are shown either riding on seven horses or flanked by his two attendants, Dandi and Pingala, or sometimes by devotees. Two traditions seem to have persisted in Nepal, the North Indian tradition and the South Indian tradition. The former is represented by Scythian dress consisting of a long tunic and boots, while the latter tradition is depicted by the wearing of the usual dhoti. Some of these images are inscribed and dated and belong mostly to the medieval and late Malla periods.

So far as the unidentified image of Kumbhesvara is concerned, no one has as yet carefully observed the lotus so clearly shown on the left of the sculpture (Pl. 81). In fact, this is the most significant solar symbol in this image, and hence it can safely be identified as a Solar Divinity, as Pal wrote in his earlier version. The modelling and trait of the main divinity, especially the short dhoti he is wearing, are similar to those of Hari-Hara of Saugal (Pl. 147) and Siva of Rastriya Nachghar (Pl. 64), indicating the style and trait of the same period if not the same atelier. On this basis we may assign the image to the 3rd century A.D.

For the identification of the two images from Mrigasthali and Aryaghat (Pls. 85, 86) we have now come to the conclusion that their identification as Solar Divinities is more acceptable than as portraits of Licchavi monarchs. Regarding the dating of these figures, I fully agree with Pal, for there are stylistic affinities with the already established traditions of the early sculpture of the valley, and on these grounds we can assign these images to the 4th century A.D.

Sometimes, Nepal offers surprising examples, parallels of which are difficult to find in India. In this context we shall refer to the fourth image found near Naksal-Chardhunge, not very far from the ancient site of Hadigaon, and now preserved at the National Museum (Pl. 79). This unusual piece has a large jar surmounted by a single head in anthropomorphic form and enveloped by a serpent hood. Like many ancient images, the face is abraded while the top part of the forehead is totally damaged. The right hand of the figure holds a *mani* (jewel) and the left appears to be holding a rosary. Both hands are protruding from the lower part of the inverted rim of the jar. No other ornaments except square earrings are visible (Pl. 80). This is an interesting type of iconographic form never seen in any sculpture of the early or late period, nor may a parallel be found for it in Indian art.

The identification of this uncommon image has become a matter of controversy. Banerjee and Rijal have identified it as a Naga on *ghata*.[1] This suggests other possibilities, too, namely the figure of Agastya which is known as Kumbhayoni. On the other hand, Pal has identified it as Varuna,[2] with a note of interrogation, while Amita Ray has identified it as Kumbha, a woman's head.[3]

For the identification of this sculptural fragment we have to look for sources from the *Ramayana*. Working on ancient materials, V.S. Agrawala has made some references from the epic according to which the immortal drink, kept stored in a *ghata* (jar), was jealously guarded by the serpent and held dear to Kubera. In the epic it also says that the priests or worshippers of the deities known as Jambha, held out the temptation of this immortal drink to followers of this cult.[4] Coomaraswamy writes, "Kubera, in the Epic, is said to possess a 'beloved thing', which gives immortality to mortals, makes the blind see, and restores youth to the old"[5]. This apparently refers to the *ghata* (jar) containing *amrita* (nectar) which was guarded by the serpents. Coomaraswamy further emphasizes the fact that when

[1] N.R. Banerjee and B.K. Rijal, *op. cit.*, p. 38 pl. VIA.
[2] P. Pal, *op. cit.*, fig. 66.
[3] Amita Ray, *The Arts of Nepal*, New Delhi, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1973, fig. 28.
[4] V.S. Agrawala, *op.cit.*, p. 175.
[5] A.K. Coomaraswamy, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

amrita is shown in art it is as a full vessel.[1] The iconography of this image predominating on the jar exactly tallies with the above description. It is therefore possible to identify the jar containing *amrita* (nectar) guarded by a serpent with seven hoods as Amrita Ghata, instead of Naga on *ghata* or Varuna. Because of the damaged condition it is not possible to study every detail minutely; however, its closest parallel will be the Seated Surya of Aryaghat (Pl. 86). The representation of unusual earrings suggests an earlier type of image and not a product of the 6th century as described by Pal. Judging from the iconography and style of carving, I would prefer to date it to the late 4th century A.D.

[1] A.K. Coomaraswamy, *op. cit.*, p.40.

Saiva Sculpture

In Nepal, the great god Siva-Mahadeva, whose abode is Mount Kailasa in the Himalayas, is by far the most popular among the gods. Throughout the religious history of the country, the cult of Siva-Pasupati has been widely prevalent among her people.

As in India, Siva is worshipped symbolically by the *linga*, the phallic emblem, as well as in human form. In his anthropomorphic form, the ithyphallic god is represented with two or four hands. The cult of Siva-Pasupati seems to have been in vogue during the early centuries of the Christian era, as clearly reflected in the early sculptures of the valley. However, one finds the earliest archaeological evidence of the Saiva cult in Nepal in the inscribed Siva-Linga which was installed by Naravarma in A.D. 466, almost one year earlier than the installation of a Vishnu-Vikranta image at Lazimpat and Pasupati (Pls. 155, 156). The inscription refers to a Siva temple which was built at the time of the installation of this Siva-Linga. Exactly two years later, in A.D. 468, another inscribed Siva-Linga was placed not very far from the above, by Ksemasundari, one of the wives of the Licchavi king Manadeva. There are countless Siva-Lingas, inscribed or uninscribed, old and new, scattered throughout the valley, attesting to the overwhelming popularity of the Saiva cult.

First, it is important to be aware of the antiquity of the Siva-Pasupati cult. It has been traced to the Indus Valley civilization of about the 3rd millennium B.C. From numerous seals which have been discovered, the deity appears to be Siva-Pasupati. In one of the seals, the male figure is seated in a cross-legged position with an erect phallus and wearing a horned headdress. He is surrounded by animals which symbolize one character of Siva-Pasupati: as a Yogi or Pasupati, lord of the animals.

Another discovery revealing a salient feature of the Indus Valley civilization was that of a large number of conical and cylindrical stones also connected with the prevailing cult of phallus worship. This shows that before the advent of the Aryan people, the earlier people worshipped the phallus as a symbol of fertility and the Mother Goddess as protectress.

There is no reference to *linga* or phallus worship by the Aryans in Vedic literature. However, two references may be quoted here from the *Rig Veda*, in one of which the Vedic god Indra was requested not to allow those whose god was *sisna* (phallus) to disturb the rites of the singers. In another, Indra is said to have conquered the treasures of the city after killing those whose god was *sisna*. Thus the Vedic Aryans seem to have considered the worshippers of *sisna* as enemies who disturbed their holy rites. Among the non-Aryan people like the Austrics, Dravidians or aboriginal tribes, the worship of the phallus seems to have been part of their folk religion.

Later on the worship of the phallus and Siva-Pasupati was assimilated into the Brahmanical pantheon and Siva became one of the most important members of the orthodox Brahmanical triad. Thus the Vedic god Rudra was associated with the cult of Siva-Pasupati; he is called Mahesvara, the great god; Mahadeva, greatest of all the gods; and Umapati, the husband of Uma as the embodiment of the great Mother Goddess.

It is said in the *Rig Veda* that Rudra discharged a powerful shaft which ran about the

heaven and earth, and one who possessed such a weapon could kill cows and men. Rudra was worshipped by singers who asked him to keep the shaft away from living beings and to protect the two-footed and four-footed. In consequence of the prayers, cattle were unharmed. Thus Rudra is said to be *Pasupa* or the protector of cattle.[1]

Siva is also called Girisa, Giritra or Girichara, and is described as the wielder of the bow, clad in a tiger-skin like the forest Nisada tribes. In the *Vanaparva* of the *Mahabharata*, Arjuna is said to have gone to the Himalayas to practice austerities. In the meanwhile, Siva appeared there dressed as a Kirata and a fight ensued between them. Arjuna was overpowered and fell to the ground exhausted. He then made an altar of earth and offered flowers in the name of Sankara (Siva). To his amazement, the flowers appeared to be placed on the head of the Kirata. Only then did Arjuna recognize Siva who was in disguise, and surrender to him. This pleased Siva who gave him a boon of *Pasupatastra*, a weapon to kill enemies. No doubt this is why the Kiratas of Nepal believe that Siva-Mahadeva is their tutelary god.

The temple of Pasupatinath may be one of the oldest Saiva shrines in Nepal and the area appears to be the seat of the Pasupati cult from very early times. Across the river Bagmati, opposite the temple of Pasupatinath, is a wooded hill known as Mrigasthali where Siva was believed to have been wandering through the forest in the guise of a *mriga*, or deer. Curiously, though, in a small shrine at Aryaghat, where images of a seated Surya and Virupaksha (Pls. 86, 98) are found, there is an image of a deer (Pl. 87) which is locally known as Mrigesvara. The deer is supposed to be Siva in the guise of an animal. The age of this image is extremely difficult to establish, for the style of carving of the animal seems to have been derived from an old convention but the base where the animal is seated appears to be the work of the more recent post-Thakuri period, a later addition. Thus the date of this image remains very uncertain.

As in India, Siva is depicted in various forms in Nepal, such as:

(i) Siva-Linga (*linga-vigraha*) in plain, conical or cylindrical shape.
(ii) Ekamukhi Siva-Linga: Siva-Linga with a single human face.
(iii) Panchamukhi Siva-Linga: with four human faces in four directions, namely Sadyojata, Vamadeva, Aghora, Tatpurusha and Isana (the top indicating the fifth face).
(iv) Siva standing alone.
(v) Siva standing with Parvati by his side and accompanied by Nandi, the bull.
(vi) Uma-Mahesvara: the divine couple seated on Kailasa.

A huge Siva-Linga, known as Kiratesvara Mahadeva, is at Mrigasthali (Pl. 88). The antiquity of this Siva-Linga is difficult to establish. However, the simplicity of carving suggests an early date which could be the early 5th century. A small but remarkable Panchamukhi Siva-Linga stands in the middle of the cross-road on the way to Mrigasthali (Pl. 89). The style is closely related to the Vishnu-Vikranta image of Tilganga (Pl. 156) and we may, therefore, assign it to the 5th or early 6th centuries. A unique example of an Ekamukhi Siva-Linga belonging to the 5th century may be cited here (Pl. 92), which is comparable to the Mukhalinga of Khoh (India) belonging to the 5th century.[2]

In the temple of Pasupatinath there is a huge Panchamukhi Siva-Linga but it is the work of a later period. It must have been replaced after the temple was destroyed by Shamsuddin Illyas of Bengal in A.D. 1349. According to an inscription, for a period of seven days the invaders looted and plundered and many works of art were destroyed or mutilated.

One of the earliest examples of the Panchamukhi Siva-Linga has recently been discovered at Balkhu (Pl. 90), where three Mother Goddesses were found. As indicated already, this place was without question an ancient site, The four faces of the Siva-Linga are badly abraded and no detail whatsoever is visible. According to the local people, the Panchamukhi Siva-Linga was until recently loosely standing on its base and was later cemented into its present position. Enough has been said about how the ancient images are badly affected by erosion rather than by mutilation. A close examination of this Siva-Linga shows that it bears all the marks of abrasion like the three ancient Mother Goddesses standing right in front of the shrine. A large type of earring is seen in this *mukha-linga* similar to those worn by the early divinities. This Siva-Linga appears to be one of the earliest, but here again accurate dating is difficult. It is no doubt a well-worn image and in all probability, a product of the 4th century A.D.

[1] R.G. Bhandarkar, *Vaishnavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems*, Poona, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1928, pp. 145-46.
[2] For a full view, see P. Pal, *op. cit.*, fig. 122.

In Indian art, one of the earliest examples of a Panchamukhi Siva-Linga is from Bhita, now at the State Museum, Lucknow. Another ancient Siva-Linga, located at Gudimallam, is datable to the 1st century B.C. An interesting example of a Siva-Linga datable to the 1st century B.C. is in the Mathura Museum (Pl. 88a). Here, a Siva-Linga is installed in front of a bushy tree which is flanked by two celestial figures with wings, and garlands in their hands. An example of Ekamukhi Siva-Linga belonging to the Kushana period is also in the Mathura Museum (Pl. 91). Though abraded, stylistically it seems to have a close affinity with the Panchamukhi Siva-Linga from Balkhu discussed above (Pl. 90).

Standing Images of Siva

Although the Siva-Pasupati cult has remained prominent in Nepal, the anthropomorphic representation of Siva in plastic art is rather limited and does not seem to have enjoyed the same popularity as the Uma-Mahesvara representation. The earliest known example of a standing Siva is at the Rastriya Nachghar (Pl. 64) and has already been discussed.

A remarkable image of Siva has recently been discovered at Balambu (Pl. 93), a small village about six miles south-west of Kathmandu where a number of Licchavi inscriptions are found. About a hundred metres from the main street of Balambu stands an open shrine and near here is an image of the standing Siva. He stands erect in *samabhanga* pose. The entire top portion of the stele is damaged and details of his face and headgear are all abraded. This figure of Siva conveys a distinct impression of physical power with his wide shoulders and strong arms. The ithyphallic god has four arms and the mode of his stance is quite close to the Mathura-Kushana tradition. His front right hand is displayed in *varadamudra* in the same peculiar manner as the Mother Goddess of Haugal-Bahal (Pl. 19) or Balkhu (Pl. 20). His left hand seems to be holding a water-pot. The two rear hands, though considerably damaged, appear to be holding a trident and a rosary in the left and right hands, respectively. A plain sash runs diagonally across the thighs, a fashion that was in vogue in the early Mathura-Kushana period. On the level of the hips the loose ends of the sash hang on either side making pleats of the garment as decorative folds. He is wearing heavy earrings, a necklace, armlets, bracelets and a dhoti, the folds of which are gathered in the centre between the legs and whose pleats at the end form decorative folds. Siva is accompanied neither by his consort Parvati nor by his *vahana* Nandi, the bull.

Another remarkable feature of this image is the depression below the navel making the image slightly pot-bellied, like the Bodhisattva image of the early Mathura-Kushana period. Some notable features which help date this image are the large earrings, diagonal sash, the pleats of the garment in a decorative fold, and the awkward manner of displaying the right hand in *varadamudra*. No writer has as yet attempted to analyse the iconographical form of this image nor has anyone tried to date it. On the evidence of its ancient features, however, it may be assigned to the late 3rd century A.D.

Another equally interesting image of Siva stands in a small shrine at Kirtipur (Pl. 95), where five images of Mother Goddesses are found. Unlike the figures of Balambu (Pl. 93), here the sculptor has treated the whole figure with soft modelling as if to give the impression of shallow relief. The front part has been carefully worked over but, in contrast, the rear portion of the stele has fine chisel marks, as though deliberately left that way. The two-handed Siva is shown as *urdhvareta*, the erect phallus signifying a perfect Brahmachari, a yogi's control over his senses. The god is standing on a small simple dais with his feet slightly apart. His scanty ornaments consist of *patrakundala*, flat earrings of a gypsy type, and a single beaded necklace with a large bead in the centre. The details of his face and headgear are slowly wearing away and both his arms are broken. He is wearing a dhoti in a simple manner without showing crease marks, except for the central folds which are gathered between the legs showing the pleats of the garment. Such a fold as already noted, may be seen on the male figure at the door of the Karle cave in western India, which is datable to the 1st century A.D. (Fig. 35). The absence of a *yajnopavita*, a diagonal sash, and his faithful attendant Nandi is conspicuous.

Strangely enough, he is represented with only two hands, a rare example indeed indicating an early work. It is highly probable that he was holding a water-pot in his left hand and the right was displayed in *varadamudra*, very like the image recently found at Hadigaon where Siva holds a water-pot in his left hand and the right hand is held in *varadamudra* (Pl. 97a). The date of this later image is difficult to

establish owing to the mutilation of his head and feet; moreover the style of wearing the dhoti and sash is very uncommon, thus making it more difficult to date.

Virtually all the standing images which belong to an early period are placed on a simple dais with the feet separated and planted firmly on the ground like their counterparts in India. This characteristic trait of an ancient tradition seems to have been borrowed from the Mathura-Kushana school of India. The style of carving is indeed very unusual and was never seen again. In fact, it is done entirely in low relief. Considering the style of carving and iconographic traits, the image of Siva from Kirtipur may be assigned to the 4th century A.D.

There is no reference to the Balambu image of Siva (Pl. 93) in Pal's book although the author has made a very brief comment on the standing Siva of Kirtipur (Pl. 95) which he dated to the 6th century A.D. But the Kirtipur image has no stylistic affinity with any of the 6th century sculptures of the valley, nor is there any iconographical reason to suggest that it is a 6th century work. It is therefore difficult to accept Pal's dating.[1]

A remarkable figure of Siva, locally known as Virupaksha (Pl. 98), stands in a small shrine at Aryaghat, Pasupati, where the Seated Surya (Pl. 86) is found. These two images are well preserved, although streams of devotees take a dip every day in the holy Bagmati and worship Virupaksha as Siva-Mahadeva by pouring water over his head, while the Seated Surya in the corner is left neglected.

The image of Virupaksha is half buried in the ground. His torso is bare and he is wearing two separate thin threads around his neck with typical earrings of *amalaka* shape. This type of earring was used for the image of Hariti from Balaju (Pl. 55) and for the Solar Divinity from Mrigasthali (Pl. 85), but is never again found in any sculpture belonging either to the Licchavi or Thakuri periods, let alone the Malla period. A peculiar feature in this image is the hair-style which is again done like a judge's wig. However, the hair-style of the Seated Surya referred to above and the Kubera from Hadigaon (Pl. 76), are almost identical. This close similarity among the images certainly reflects a common stylistic trait that evolved within the framework of their own tradition among indigenous craftsmen. Here, Siva is shown as ithyphallic. With the distinct mark of the third eye in his forehead there should be no mistaken identity. But strangely this image of Siva was identified as a portrait of a "nobleman" by Madanjit Singh.[2]

Note that the treatment of the carving as well as the modelling are marked by a distinctly native style. The facial features have the character of an ethnic group like the Kiratas, the non-Aryan people of the valley. The visage is round and fleshy with a slightly pointed chin which has a thin line incised in the middle (Pl. 99). The non-Aryan or Mongoloid face has strong character, with full lips, flat nose and beautifully shaped eyes. The outline of the eyes resembles that of a fish and the pupils are delicately and naturally rendered. Siva gazes intently, almost penetratingly, and unlike the image of Mrigasthali (Pl. 85), the expression is tender with a faint smile on the lips.

The contour of the image is sharply defined and the treatment of the torso is rather flat. Since both hands are buried, it is difficult to say what their attributes were. The sacred thread of the god is conspicuously absent. The dating of this tantalizing image is difficult. On stylistic grounds, it could be assigned to the late 4th century. Pal, on the other hand, suggested a 6th century date, but in view of the absence of the sacred thread and the occurrence of the old type of earrings, it is highly improbable that this image belongs to the 6th century A.D. There is hardly any basis for accepting this date, either stylistically or iconographically. By the 6th century the plastic art of Nepal had already achieved greater sophistication under a fairly long apprenticeship of sculptural practice, which is strongly reflected in a number of images belonging to that period.

Mention must be made of a torso of Siva which is found half buried in front of the Bagh Bhairava temple, Kirtipur (Pl. 97). The torso being so badly mutilated it is very difficult to furnish details of the figure; however, the god seems to be holding a water-pot in his left hand which is similar to the water-pot of Brahmani from Kirtipur (Pl. 39) datable to the 3rd century A.D. Another early feature to be noticed in this torso is the style of dhoti which is identical to the Solar Divinity of Kumbhesvara, Visvarupa Vishnu of Kutubahal and Hari-Hara of Saugal, Patan (Figs. 81, 141, 147). These are the early features to be seen in the torso of Siva, and on stylistic grounds it can be assigned to at least the late 4th century A.D.

[1] P. Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 98, figs. 145, 146.
[2] Madanjit Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

Seated Image of Siva

An interesting image of a seated Siva, an example of early work (Pl. 101), is found in a small wayside shrine at Chikamangal, Kathmandu. He is four-headed, though only three of the heads are visible. Because of his three heads, the god has been wrongly identified by the local people and worshipped as Brahma. In fact there are rare examples of a four-headed Siva in Nepal. It would be relevant here to make reference to the well-known three-faced image in the Elephanta Cave belonging to the 7th-8th centuries A.D., as this is regarded as a unique piece in Indian art.[1] There has been some controversy regarding its proper identification. It was Gopinath Rao who first identified the image as Mahesamurti of Siva.[2] Kramrisch also identified it as Mahadeva of Elephanta and according to her, the three faces represented Vamadeva, Tatpurusa and Aghora as aspects of Siva,[3] while Banerjea interpreted the composite image as the Saumya and Ghora aspects of Siva along with his Sakti Uma.[4] Likewise, the three-headed Siva of Chikamangal (Pl. 101) may be identified as Siva-Mahadeva.

Here, Siva is sitting in *lalitasana* on a simple rock. He is four-handed and represented as ithyphallic. Although the faces are badly abraded, his ornaments are visible. These consist of a large beaded necklace and heavy earrings of a type similar to those worn by the Seated Surya (Pl. 86), the Mother Goddess of Balkhu (Pl. 20) or Siva of the Rastriya Nachghar (Pl. 64). A snake round his torso forms a sacred thread. His front right hand, resting against the knee, is displayed in *varadamudra* with a cupped palm similar to other early images. His left hand, although not very distinct, seems to hold a water-pot similar to that of Siva from Hadigaon (Pl. 97). The attributes of the rear hands are not recognizable. Like Siva of Balambu, he is slightly pot-bellied. The absence of a flamed halo and the rock formation indicate an early piece. In view of this, it is datable to the later part of the 4th century A.D.

Among the fragments of Saiva sculptures, let us refer here to the head of Siva (Pl. 100) now preserved in the National Museum, Kathmandu. Like the images of early groups, though abraded, one can see the shape of the face which is round, fleshy and slightly pointed at the chin. From this fragment it is indeed hard to tell the age, but one thing is clear: it is an early piece although Pal has dated it to the 6th century. The image in question still bears marks of the lingering tradition of the Mathura school, for instance in the treatment of the face and locks of hair on the back. I would prefer to date this piece to the late 4th or early 5th centuries A.D.

Image of Siva-Parvati

A remarkable image of Siva-Parvati (Pl. 103), probably the earliest of the kind in Nepal, is ound in a small shrine near the Bagh Bhairava temple at Kirtipur, where five Mother Goddesses (Pls. 37, 40, 41, 43, 45) and a standing figure of Siva (Pl. 95) are found. Among the artists of Nepal this type of iconographical form was obviously less popular than the Uma-Mahesvara theme.

Here, an ithyphallic Siva stands erect in *samabhanga* pose with his feet slightly apart. The upper portion of the stele is mutilated and, strangely, the image is no longer worshipped. This four-handed Siva is wearing heavy earrings, a necklace consisting of large single beads, armlets, a dhoti and a diagonal sash, whose ends are delineated with pleats of decorative folds, indeed an ubiquitous feature of early reliefs. Likewise the folds of the dhoti are gathered in the centre between the legs where the pleats are arranged at the end in a decorative fold.

Siva has a round, chubby face and massive shoulders with strong arms. The right front hand holds a bunch of flowers and the front left a water-pot. The rear hands are damaged but it is possible that the left hand was holding a rosary and the right a trident.

On the left of Siva is Parvati who stands erect in *samabhanga* pose and holds a bunch of flowers in her right hand and in the left a mirror. She wears a large type of earrings, armlets, a necklace and a garment reaching down to the anklets. A diagonal sash runs across her thighs. Although her face is badly abraded, one can distinguish the hair-style which is very similar to Gaja-Laksmi of Naihiti (Pl. 7), the Mother

[1] S.N. Chaturvedi, "A Note on the Mahadeva Image of Elephanta", *Bulletin of Museums and Archaeology in U.P.*, no. 8, p. 11.
[2] T.A. Gopinath Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*; vol.11, part II, Madras, 1914-15, pp. 382-85.
[3] Stella Kramrisch, *Ancient India*, Bulletin of the Archaeological Survey of India, no. 2, pp.4-8.
[4] J.N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, pp. 476-77.

Goddess of Kotaltol (Pl. 15) or Hariti of Balaju (Pl. 55). Behind the divine couple, Nandi the bull sits with his head turned towards his master, Siva.

It may be mentioned here that there is a great similarity of modelling between the figure of Parvati and the Sakti from the Rastriya Nachghar (Pl. 66). Furthermore, a strikingly similar figure of Ekanamsa may be cited from the Patna Museum (Pl. 67), datable to the 1st century A.D. If a comparison is drawn one finds similarities between these figures. For example, the upper part of the body in these female goddesses is rather short with expansive hips while the lower part is comparatively elongated. The goddesses are wearing a similar type of long skirt, heavy anklets and a diagonal sash in an identical manner. These are the early features to be seen in the general treatment of the figure whether it is Parvati, Sakti or Ekanamsa. It is indeed striking how the echo of such stylistic norms could have reached the valley at such an early date. One gathers that there was regular contact between the people of Ganga-Yamuna valley and the local patrons or artists of the Kathmandu valley. The stele is carved out of a single block of light-coloured sandstone. It must be noted here that the representative rock formation and a flame halo are absent. The lower part shows that the relief was originally fixed on a base for worship. As this relief bears some ancient motifs it could be dated to the late 4th century A.D. An image of Siva-Parvati belonging to the late Malla period from Kumbhesvara-dhara, Patan (Pl. 102) may be cited here for comparative study. The stylistic traits at once reveal the great difference between the images of the same theme cited above.

Uma-Mahesvara

Over a period of many years, the artists of Nepal have created images with many variations, yet the Uma-Mahesvara panel has remained much the same and is a most popular theme. In this form, the great god Mahesvara (Siva) and his consort, Uma, sit together on Mount Kailasa, their favourite abode. In early sculptures they are accompanied by only two attendants, Nandi, the bull, and their son, Kumara. This simple form gradually changed as other members of Siva's family were depicted in the centuries following . Later this exuberant and ornate design became almost a dominant factor. Thus when we carefully study the iconographical development of the Uma-Mahesvara theme in Nepal, it becomes evident that the earlier the representation, the simpler the composition.

One of the oldest examples of an Uma-Mahesvara relief is found in the Chamunda temple precinct in Patan (Pl. 105). Banerjee, who first wrote about it, has assigned it to the 4th-5th centuries.[1] Although no arguments are given for dating this image he has rightly pointed out that this is "the earliest specimen of the theme in Nepal". Indeed, a quick look will at once reveal the crude workmanship of this image. Here a two-handed Siva is seated in *lalitasana* with the right leg pendant and the left resting on the seat. The details of the face are lost both because of abrasion and mutilation. In spite of erosion one can still trace ornaments similar to those of the Siva of Balambu (Pl. 93) or the Siva of the Rastriya Nachghar (Pl. 64). His right hand is raised and seems to be holding a flower or something similar, now unrecognizable, while his left hand is resting against his thigh. He is wearing a dhoti but the details of the garment are lost. A broad sash with several folds goes right across his abdomen, a rather unusual feature, for it is seen for the first time. The ithyphallic god is sitting in a stiff posture and the coarseness of the treatment is blatant.

Another remarkable feature of this panel is the delineation of Uma's figure in which the lower portion of her body is completely turned on her left side while the torso and head are abruptly twisted on her right side towards Siva. This is indeed an awkward and unnatural posture, for anatomically this position is impossible. The awkwardness is emphasised by the left arm of the goddess which is too large and heavy , and also the oversized hand , which is placed on the seat. Such an unnatural movement of the body obviously marks an early attempt at the Uma-Mahesvara relief by an unknown Nepalese sculptor. Similarly, the female figure from Pithalkhora, now housed in the National Museum, New Delhi (Pl. 104), has almost the same awkward movement of body, although not so crudely displayed as the Uma of Chamunda temple (Pl. 105). The elongated figure of Uma with a disproportionate torso, short neck and long limbs, lacks both anatomical proportion and a graceful posture. Turning her body amorously towards her husband Siva, the goddess seems to be looking intently at her lord's face. She is wearing a necklace, anklets

[1] N.R. Banerjee, "Note on the Iconography of Uma-Mahesvara in Nepal," *Ancient Nepal*, Journal of the Department of Archaeology, no.1, October 1967, pp. 22-23, Kathmandu.

and heavy earrings like those of the Mother Goddesses (Pls. 20, 37).Her hair-style is similar to Mahisamardini of Hadigaon (Pl. 59), also an early feature. Her small but firm breasts are also similar to the Mother Goddess of Haugal-Bahal (Pl. 19). The treatment of modelling and carving certainly points to an indigenous tradition which must have prevailed among sculptors in those days.

Kumara, the youngest of their sons, is seated on Uma's left knee but details of the figure are damaged by erosion. Behind the divine couple, the entire background is covered by the body of the huge bull, Nandi, which is seated with its face on one side of Siva. It must be noted here that Kumara and Nandi are the only attendants. This is regarded as an early version of the Uma-Mahesvara panel and therefore could be assigned to the 3rd century A.D.

A second interesting example of an Uma-Mahesvara panel is from Pasupati (Pl. 106), where a two-handed Siva is seated with legs crossed. Although the relief is badly damaged by erosion, one can discern his matted hair, necklace and heavy earrings which are again similar to the Siva of Balambu (Pl.93) and the Siva of the Rastriya Nachghar (Pl. 64). His right hand is raised and seems to be holding something similar to that of the Siva of Chamunda temple (Pl. 105), while his left hand is placed on the left thigh.His left foot is awkwardly placed where the pleats of his garment spill over the front pedestal. He is represented as *urdhvareta*.

Uma is seated on Siva's left with her face towards her husband (Pl. 106) while the lower body, in particular the folded legs, are carried over to her left with a gentle swing as though the whole body were floating in the air. As a sculptural composition this relief is definitely a much improved version over the one shown in the Chamunda temple (Pl. 105). Uma's right arm is placed beneath Siva's, embracing him tenderly, while the left hand rests against her left knee. The sculptor has treated her body with greater linear fluency and softer rhythm. Here again her hair-style is similar to that of the Mahisamardini of Hadigaon (Pl. 59). Nandi, the bull is seated on the right of Siva, and Kumara, on the neck of the bull holding the horns in each of his hands. The pot-bellied Kumara is hardly visible as the upper part of his body is completely mutilated. Note that Nandi and Kumara are the only attendants of the divine couple which is indeed an early feature of Uma-Mahesvara panels; this leads us to suggest an early date, quite possibly, the 3rd-4th centuries A.D

A third Uma-Mahesvara panel recently discovered in the Kumbhesvara temple precinct may also be referred to here (Pl. 107). The relief is badly mutilated and details are hardly visible. Siva, who is ithyphallic, is sitting in *lalitasana*. His two hands are rendered in positions similar to that of Siva from Pasupati (Pl. 106).On his left is Uma who, though badly damaged, appears to be sitting in a position similar to the goddess Uma from Pasupati (Pl. 106). Also Nandi is similarly placed on the right of Siva. Because of the broken condition it is difficult to assess whether Kumara was depicted in this relief. However, a comparative study will reveal that there is a very close similarity between this relief and the one from Pasupati. Judging from the style and hieratic traits the panel is datable to the 4th century A.D.

Another example, a unique relief of Uma-Mahesvara, is from the Archaeological Garden, Patan (Pl. 109). It is difficult to say where the image was brought from as no such record exists; nevertheless, this damaged panel is one of the finest pieces of Nepalese art. The upper portion of the panel is broken and the heads of the divine couple are missing. Siva is given two hands and the ithyphallic god is sitting in *lalitasana*. His ornaments consist of armlets, bracelets and a necklace with a large square sapphire in the centre. He is wearing a dhoti and below the knee one can see the fold of the garment in a semicircular form, as seen in the Seated Surya from Aryaghat (Pl. 86). A similar style may be observed in a number of male divinities of the Mathura-Kushana period. His raised right hand seems to be holding a flower rather than displaying in *abhayamudra* for, unlike the Mathura-Kushana images of India, the Brahmanical images in Nepal are rarely shown in *abhayamudra*. The broad and massive chest, strong arms, and also the manner in which the left fist is held are reminiscent of Bodhisattva figures from Sarnath (Fig. 3) and Maholi.

The body of Siva is turned slightly towards Uma. The stylized folds of the pleated sash hang to the right and are again similar to the Seated Surya of Aryaghat (Pl. 86). Stylistically, these two panels have a close relationship and may well be the product of the same period. Here Uma is sitting to the left of Siva swinging her left hip and fleshy thighs, while the head, though broken, is turned towards her husband as if to fix a gaze on his eyes. It is indeed one of the most elegant movements to be seen and, unlike the stiff body of Uma at the Chamunda temple (Pl. 105), this is obviously a realistic and elegant pose. The sculptor has rendered her figure with a great sense of proportion and linear fluency. She is wearing

bracelets, a necklace and a garment which is almost diaphanous. Her right arm gently embraces Siva's shoulder, while her left, resting against her knee, holds the remaining part of the scarf. It should be noted with care how different the pleats of the sash and scarf in this relief are, when compared with the Seated Surya (Pl. 86). In early sculptures the pleats of a garment or dhoti were done in a simple manner with two or three folds (Figs. 36-48). From this period onwards multiple pleats appear in a more stylized form, marking a departure from the old motif as seen in a number of early images.

To the left of Uma is a mutilated figure who may easily be identified as Kumara. A *moora* (wicker stool) is placed in the extreme left of the panel. The representation of a wicker stool has never again been found in any sculpture. The head of the devoted Nandi is missing but part of his hump, ear and throat are visible, and he appears to be sitting behind the divine couple, and to the right of Siva. The relief is carved from a light yellowish-white sandstone. Although damaged in several places, it nevertheless retains some original stone polish in patches. The workmanship and modelling are superb; undoubtedly it is one of the finest pieces of religious art and could have come only from the hand of a master craftsman. What is obvious to us in this image is the absence of the sacred thread and the rock formation design. On this basis, I am inclined to assign it to the early 4th century A.D.

A controversy of dating arose when two scholars attempted to analyse the age of this sculpture. Banerjee has suggested a 6th-7th century date,[1] while Pal considers it a product of the 7th century.[2] But we have already shown that, like the early version, this relief has only two attendants, Nandi and Kumara. Uma-Mahesvara panels belonging to the 7th century are represented with the rock design, *ganas* as well as the flame halo. In the absence of these elements the relief of Archaeological Garden (Pl. 109) must be considered an earlier version.

To gain a clearer view, let us see how, over the centuries, the forms and images of the Uma-Mahesvara relief have undergone a process of change. So far we have encountered the panel of Uma-Mahesvara in simple form and iconography where Siva is given only two hands and is accompanied by Nandi and Kumara. Let us now take six Uma-Mahesvara panels of different periods which will reveal the evolution and amazing changes in composition, style and iconography. The first is the Uma-Mahesvara panel from Kumbhesvara temple precinct (Pl. 110). Here, Siva is seated in *lalitasana* and for the first time he has four hands. The rear hands of the ithyphallic god are holding a rosary and a flower in the right and left hands, respectively. The front right hand seems to be displayed in *varadamudra,* and the left hand rests against his knee. He wears a crown, earrings, a broad necklace, bracelets, armlets and a dhoti. He has a broad chest and strong arms which seem to be closely related to the figure of Vishnu from Tilganga, Pasupati (Pl. 156).

Unlike the early Uma-Mahesvara panels discussed above, Uma sits in a completely different manner, in *lalitasana,* with her left foot pendant and the right resting on the seat. She is facing her husband, but not embracing him nor is she looking intimately at his face as seen in previous panels. She holds a lotus in her right hand while the left rests on the seat. She wears earrings, a necklace, armlets, bracelets, anklets and a beaded girdle. Behind the heads of Uma-Mahesvara, plain haloes are incised.

Kumara stands between his mother and the female attendant and the style of modelling has a very close affinity with the female figure who stands behind king Bali in the Vishnu-Vikranta relief from Tilganga (Pl. 157). On the left of Uma, the female attendant who is sitting in *lalitasana* holds a crudely delineated fly-whisk. For the first time we come across the plain haloes behind the divine couple and also notice at the top corners two attendants of Siva as guards, who hold tridents in their hands. Nandi sits on the right of Siva in a placid mood. The panel, which is still in a preliminary stage in comparison to the later Uma-Mahesvara reliefs, is datable to the 5th century A.D.

A second example of an Uma-Mahesvara panel from Mrigasthali (Pl. 111) is equally interesting. The heads of the divine couple and the female attendant are broken. The four-handed ithyphallic Siva sits in *lalitasana* and holds a trident and rosary in the rear right and left hands. The front right hand now holds a boss while the left rests against the thigh. It may be observed here that for the first time Siva holds a trident and *vijapuraka.* He wears a dhoti and his ornaments consist of a necklace, armlets and bracelets.

Uma sits in *lalitasana* to the left of Siva and does not face him as seen in the early panels.

[1] N.R. Banerjee, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
[2] P. Pal, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88, fig. 128.

She wears earrings, a necklace, bracelets, anklets and a *stanapatta* (brassiere) and her garment is secured by a beaded girdle. Her right hand holds a flower and the left is mutilated. On the left of Uma is a female attendant who is four-handed and holds a fly-whisk in her right rear hand, while in the left, the remaining part of the scarf is pleated in multiple folds. Her right front hand holds a flower and her left a sword.

Plain haloes appear behind the heads of the divine couple and the female attendant. The two attendants of Siva appear on both sides at the top, and are holding tridents in their hands and wearing crowns on their heads. The old faithful Nandi, with a prominent hump, sits on the left of his lord and, to the right of his father's leg, Kumara sits in *apadasana* pose. On the lower panel we see the three *ganas* of Siva's family for the first time. They are entertaining the divine couple. Also note the first introduction of a simple rock design on the dais of Siva as well as on the background of the divinities.

The modelling of Siva and Uma and also the female attendant has the distinct character of heavily proportioned bodies, giving an impression of physical power. Siva sits majestically, displayed in a powerful form. Uma's voluptuous body also conveys a sense of physical opulence with heavy and luxuriant hips, yet her outline is smooth and harmonious. The workmanship of this relief reveals a matured style of the 5th-6th centuries A.D.

The next stage of development is marked by a third specimen of an Uma-Mahesvara relief from Gairidhara, Thamel (Pl. 112). Siva is ithyphallic and four-handed and sits in *sukhasana* pose. Although his face is damaged one can see heavy earrings, armlets and bracelets. Except for the left front hand which is resting on his thigh, the other three hands are mutilated. For the first time Siva wears the *udarabandha*, a girdle which henceforth becomes a salient feature in the dress of male divinities.

Uma, whose face also is damaged, sits on the left of Siva, turning her body to the left and amorously resting her right hand on her husband's lap, while her left arm is placed on her thigh, the hieratic style borrowed from the reliefs at Pasupati and the Archaeological Garden (Pls. 106,109). She is heavily adorned with ornaments and wears a beaded girdle. Her elegant posture suggests a supple body and graceful linear flow while Siva's pose, in comparison, appears rather stiff. The female attendant standing to the left of Uma holds a sword in her right hand and in her left, a water-pot. Uma is two-handed, wearing a diaphanous garment, and her multi-folded sash hangs diagonally to her left.

On the right of Siva, Kumara is sitting on Nandi. At the top corners are two attendants holding tridents in their hands; only the upper parts of their bodies are visible. This resembles the panel of Kumbhesvara (Pl. 110). The lower panel of the relief is marked by the absence of *ganas*, the family of the divine couple. The upper and lower portions of the relief are executed in a simple rock design which is less elaborate, and still in the preliminary stage. Stylistically, this relief is close to the Mrigasthali panel (Pl. 111) and therefore may be assigned to the 6th century A.D.

The fourth representation of an Uma-Mahesvara panel is from Amarkantesvara, Pasupati (Pl. 113). This marks a remarkable and complete departure in composition and iconographical details. This relief, which may be assigned to the 8th-9th centuries A.D., has not only gained in height but also illustrates superb quality in plastic art. This oblong relief now serves as a model for future reliefs and accommodates many figures belonging to *Kailasa parivara,* the family of Siva.

The four-handed Siva sits on a cushion in his usual pose with which we are now familiar. His rear right hand holds a rosary and the left, a trident with curved blades on the sides. His front right hand displays a boss and the left arm, which gently rests on Uma's shoulder, holds a water-pot.

Uma sits gracefully on a cushion with her left foot resting on the seat and the right leg pendant, while a dwarf female attendant holds her foot. Her right hand has a flower, the left rests on her knee and a parrot sits on her hand. A four-handed attendant, to the left of Uma, has a fly-whisk and a pot of offerings in her rear right and left hands, while her front right hand holds a jewel and the left, a sword. To the left of Siva is Kumara, seated on Nandi. On the top corners, the two attendants of Siva have four hands with their attributes, and their half-bodies emerge from the rocky mountains. For the first time there are seven *ganas* in the lower panel in which Ganesa occupies the central place. They are in the act of dancing and playing music. Also one will notice the portrayal of the river goddess Ganga on the top of the relief. She holds a scarf in her rear hands while the front hands are held in *anjalimudra* and are in the process of pouring water over the head of Siva. The most interesting feature of Ganga is her acrobatic movement. She is surrounded by clouds indicating heaven. Her portrayal in the acrobatic posture seems to be purely an innovation of the Nepalese artist, for such a parallel is hard to find in the Uma-Mahesvara reliefs in India.

Here the entire relief from top to bottom has beautiful rock formations, suggesting Mount Kailasa; this rock design is treated with greater stylization than in previous reliefs. Behind the heads of Siva and his two attendants, beautiful flamed haloes show the superb craftsmanship of the artist. On the rock-formation seat where the divine couple sit, ends of the garments are spilled with pleats of decorative folds in a highly stylized form. This panel is undoubtedly one of the finest examples found in the valley of Kathmandu and belongs to the late Licchavi period. Several similar ones also exist in the valley. As a favourite theme among Nepalese artists, they have indeed achieved superb quality, both in composition and iconography. By the time this relief was carved, the iconographical forms of the Uma-Mahesvara theme had reached the culmination of creativity, scarcely matched by any other period. But from this time onwards, a gradual decline occurs in quality, modelling and composition which is illustrated in the following.

The fifth example is the panel of Uma-Mahesvara from Gyabu, Patan (Pl. 114). It is an inscribed relief and the date is Nepal Samvat 107 corresponding to A.D. 987. Unlike the relief of Amarkantesvara (Pl. 113), this panel is crowded by Siva's attendants without any attempt at segregation. Also a large *chatra* (parasol) in the central top appears for the first time. Furthermore, the figure of Ganga shifts from the centre to the right, opposite a flying celestial being who is holding a garland over Siva's head. The divine couple sit on a tiger-skin and below their seat, placed over the rock, are different objects of offerings. Kumara now rides a peacock. Here one notices that the rock formation no longer forms a major decorative pattern. On the whole this panel is crowded and of inferior workmanship.

The next example of an Uma-Mahesvara panel is from Hadigaon, and is inscribed and dated A.D. 1414 (Pl. 115). One can see at once how this 15th century relief is marked by a more degenerate tendency where the quality of modelling has become inferior and suffers in contrast with the earlier ones. Though Siva is four-armed, he is no longer ithyphallic. He is sitting in a static pose, and the lower part of his body is rather disproportionate. The sitting posture of Uma, too, is stiff and unnatural and she has lost all the sensuous elegance of the previous reliefs. Even more elaborate is the ornamentation which dominates the entire stele. Thus, a comprehensive study of Uma-Mahesvara panels beginning from the early centuries of the Christian era to the middle of the 15th century clearly shows how the stylistic and iconographical features have undergone a distinct transformation.

Dating of images is an extremely difficult task and unless one is thoroughly familiar with the basic traditions, styles and their evolution, it would be almost impossible to date an image with reasonable certainty; therefore, a detailed survey is the most essential element for establishing the chronological framework.

There is one more panel from Sikubahi (Pl. 116) which deserves more thorough study. Although it bears an inscription and the date of Saka Samvat 495, corresponding to A.D. 573, paradoxically the iconographical traits and stylistic forms of this relief indicate a much earlier work. The text of the inscription does not have any affiliation with the image, yet most scholars have accepted the date on the merit of the inscription.

The panel is partly repaired in cement plaster. Upon closer examination it is more than apparent that the compositional simplicity and stylistic traits of this relief have a close affinity with an earlier version which differs from the 6th century style. This relief is significantly marked by the absence of the sacred thread, rock formation and halo with a flame border. *Ganas* are also excluded in this relief as in the other early panels. Banerjee justly remarks: "The plumpness of the figures, the somewhat stunted hands and legs (in the case of Siva), the complete absence of the attendant figures on the sides and presumably in the upper parts of the stele as well, the delineation of the figure of Siva with two arms, the crudeness and imbalance of the niche for Siva's right foot, and the absence of either the tiger-skin or cushion seat are ample indications of the early date of the sculpture."[1]

Firstly, this panel is done in a somewhat rudimentary style which immediately suggests a close affinity with an early type. Secondly and significantly, though inscribed, there is no mention of the installation of the Uma-Mahesvara image; the inscription mentions only the installation of the original images of the Mother Goddesses, the *matrikas*. Thirdly, there is no relationship between the date and style of the relief. Fourthly, there is the matter of the maladjustment of the lines of the inscription and the incongruous manner in which it is inscribed on the pedestal. Fifthly, here Siva is represented with two hands only as seen in the early Uma-Mahesvara panels. In a 6th century Uma-Mahesvara panel, Siva is

[1] N.R. Banerjee and B.K. Rijal, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

represented with four hands along with the *ganas*. Such features are completely absent in the Sikubahi panel. Furthermore, not only the sitting posture of Uma but also her hair-style (Fig. 21), which is quite similar to Uma's hairdo from Chamunda temple and Pasupati (Pls. 105, 106) clearly indicate an early date. Such a hair-style is not found in any female divinity from the 5th century onwards.

The inscription of the relief refers to the original earthen images of *matrikas* which were installed by some relative of Rajput Vajraratha. As they were damaged in the course of time, Babhru Varma thought of a restoration, but he died before the work was done; therefore, Desa Bhattarika, the mother of his nephew, completed the stone images of the *matrikas*.

This indicates that the inscription was made on the already existing image of Uma-Mahesvara, and therefore one sees no stylistic affinity of this relief with the 6th century sculpture. A close study of the arrangement of the lines of the inscription will further show a later addition. For example, the first line starts from the very top corner of the pedestal without leaving even a marginal space. Note also that the lines of the inscription run over the design of the pleated scarf. This is very unusual. As seen in the other inscribed sculptures, inscriptions are always made on a plain pedestal without at all disturbing any part of the sculpture. If an inscription has to be made, the sculptor obviously leaves enough space for it. In addition to these facts, also note that the Sikubahi panel shows definitely less elaborate relief. Stylistically it is very close to the Archaeological Garden (Pl. 109) and Kumbhesvara panels (Pl. 107). On these grounds one may conclude that the inscription is undoubtedly a later addition to the already existing Uma-Mahesvara panel. These evidences show that this relief of Uma-Mahesvara belongs to a much earlier period than the 6th century A.D.; a late 4th century date seems a closer assumption.

Apart from the five Uma-Mahesvara reliefs belonging to the early groups, a few fragmentary sculptures still remain unnoticed. For example, in front of the Ganesa temple at Hadigaon where the image of Mahisamardini (Pl. 59) was discovered, a broken relief of Siva was found buried in the ground (Pl. 117). The figure may be identified as that of Siva sitting in *lalitasana*. His four hands and entire left part are missing. The ithyphallic god sits on a dais with a full blown lotus design, and he wears armlets. Because of the mutilated condition nothing more can be said in detail about this relief; however, the sitting posture of Siva is close to the Uma-Mahesvara panel and the stylistic trait indicates that the relief is not older than the 6th century A.D.

A more baffling sculpture is found above the fountain spout near the Satya Narayana temple at Hadigaon. A proper assessment as to whether it is a completely damaged relief or an unfinished one remains difficult. It may quite possibly be the product of a novice. The main divinity sitting in *lalitasana* is four-handed and seems to be ithyphallic. His two front hands are broken but the rear hand appears to be holding some unidentified objects. His headgear, heavy earrings, broad necklace and bracelets indicate ancient features. On his left is a female figure sitting with large pendulous breasts and heavy earrings, reminiscent of Gaja-Laksmi from Naihiti (Chyasaltol), Patan (Pl. 7). From these fragmentary traits, it is indeed difficult to determine, with any precision, its age and identification.

Vaisnava Sculpture

It is commonly believed that Saivism was the oldest cult in Nepal; however, our survey has now established the fact that the Vaisnava cult was also prevalent as early as the 2nd century A.D. The recent discovery of a number of Vaisnava images in the valley of Kathmandu reveals the existence of the Vaisnava cult in the early centuries of the Christian era. These ancient images illustrate the evolution, development and iconography of Vaisnava sculpture in Nepal.

Inscriptional evidence shows that the antiquity of Vaisnava art goes back to the 5th century A.D. as seen in two images of Vishnu-Vikranta, one from Lazimpat, now preserved in the National Museum, Kathmandu (Pl. 155), and the other from a paddy field near Tilganga at Pasupati (Pl. 156). They were consecrated by the Licchavi king Manadeva, in the name of his mother Rajyavati, in A.D.467. These two sculptures, having identical themes, inscriptions and dates, are the earliest dated icons in Nepal.

An epigraphical record of the Vaisnava cult in Nepal actually occurs in the pillar inscription of king Manadeva, dated A.D. 464, still standing in front of the Changu Narayana temple, about ten kilometres north-east of Kathmandu. The opening verses of the pillar inscription evoke Hari of Doladri (the ancient name of Changu Narayana) who was worshipped by the devotees. This evidently suggests that before the inscription was made there was already a temple of Hari existing in Doladri.

Though the Vishnu-Vikranta reliefs mentioned above are the earliest inscribed icons in Nepal, yet they are not the earliest among the sculptures. They were indeed preceded by scores of Brahmanical images which are distinctly different in style and iconographical traits from the two inscribed images from Lazimpat and Tilganga (Pls. 155,156). Furthermore, the modelling and stylistic treatment of the above mentioned reliefs are far more sophisticated than the early sculptures. The relief from Tilganga, in particular, seems to have been tempered by the Gupta art of India. One may surmise, then, that these inscribed reliefs of Vishnu-Vikranta are the result of a long and continuous practice in the sculptural art of Nepal. They were certainly commissioned by king Manadeva and evidently the local sculptors were responsible for their creation.

It is thus clear that the Vaisnava religion was prevalent in Nepal earlier than epigraphical evidence suggests. In this context, an interesting image of a standing Vishnu from Satya Narayana temple, Hadigaon (Pl. 119) may be mentioned. The four-armed Vishnu is standing erect in *samabhanga* pose. He is standing on a simple dais with his feet slightly apart like the Kushana image of Karttikeya from the Mathura Museum (Pl. 122). The god is shown here with his *ayudhas* (attributes) including a conch, a discus and a mace. The conch shell of Vishnu symbolises prosperity and wealth, while the discus signifies universality and power; so also the mace is a prominent weapon of strength. The *Mahabharata* gives a full account of these attributes of the god. In addition, the display of *varadamudra* signifies the beneficent and benevolent aspects of the god. These are the main emblems of the early Vishnus in Nepal. Other objects such as the lotus, the sword, the bow, the shield, and the plough-share are additions to images of a later period.

The upper part of the Vishnu image from Hadigaon is badly damaged and the left part of the face is entirely gone, while the upper part of the forehead is marked with a depression as if it were deeply

incised around the forehead (Pls. 120, 121). The daily rituals of bathing, from a remote period to the present day, have evidently caused this abrasion. During our research it was found that devotees, including the priest who was a Jyapu, poured water several times each day over the head of the deity. It is little wonder that this image has suffered major damage.

It is interesting to note that the style of headgear of this sculpture is very close to that of the Mathura-Kushana images. The god is wearing enormous earrings exactly like those of Gaja-Laksmi of Naihiti (Pl. 7), and Laksmi from the Mathura Museum (Pl. 5), datable to the Kushana period. Among other ornaments, a heavy necklace and bracelets are also visible. A triple-folded sash hangs diagonally across the thighs like those in a number of early sculptures of the valley.

The top right hand of Vishnu holds a discus, the details of which are obliterated. The lower right hand is held in *varadamudra* with the palm cupped in a style similar to that of the female divinities from Haugal-Bahal (Pl. 19) and Balkhu (Pl. 20) and also the male divinities from Balambu and Saugal (Pls. 93, 147). The upper left hand of the god holds a mace with a handle similar to that of Vishnu from the Rastriya Nachghar (Pl. 65). It must be remembered that the mace of Vishnu, particularly from the 5th century onwards, tapers from top to bottom without any special handle and is not like the one we see in this image. The lower left hand of the god holds a conch slightly diagonally, like the image from Saugal (Pl. 147).

The arms of the god are large and solid and his shoulders are broad and massive, while both the elbows are retracted and this must have served as a prototype for future images. His dhoti is attached to the waist and as usual the central folds are gathered between the legs. The dhoti stops below the knees and is marked by a semicircular fold at the end. It may well be observed here that Vishnu stands alone, but in later versions, say from the 5th century onwards, he is accompanied by Laksmi and Garuda (Pls. 129,130,131). On this basis, too, this image may be considered to be one of the earliest of the groups. Judging from the style and iconographical traits, it may be the earliest standing Vishnu image of Nepal, datable to the 2nd-3rd centuries A.D.

For a comparative study, let us briefly refer to the two images from Bhita and Jhusi. The standing Vishnu of Bhita, datable to the 4th century A.D. now preserved in the Lucknow Museum (Pl. 123), is four-handed. He has a mace and disc in his upper right and left hands, respectively, while the front right hand holds a boss and the left, a conch. The Hadigaon Vishnu has no boss. The holding of a boss in the right hand seems to have evolved only from the 4th century in Nepal as well as in India. For example, the Seated Surya from Aryaghat (Pl. 86) and Amrita Ghata from Naksal, now housed in the National Museum, Kathmandu (Pl.79) hold a boss, like the image from Bhita (Pl. 123).

The Vishnu image from Jhusi (Pl. 124), now housed at the Allahabad Museum, is also four-handed and assignable to the early 5th century. The god holds a boss in his front right hand and a conch in his left. Unlike the Vishnu image from Hadigaon, both rear hands in this image rest on his attributes, the right hand on a mace and the left on a disc. There is a plain halo behind the head. A single beaded necklace, characteristic of early 5th century Gupta art, is the main ornament. The god stands with his feet close together and not apart as in the Kushana image. The torso is broad and massive, while the front hands are rather small, in total disregard of actual anatomy. In contrast, the arms of the Hadigaon Vishnu (Pl. 119) are large and solid, reminiscent of Kushana images. It must be noted that the images of Vishnu belonging to the Kushana period are well-proportioned and only three attributes are seen: a mace, a discus and a conch. However, in some cases Vishnu also holds a *jalapatra* (water-pot) in place of a conch, like that of Maitreya Bodhisattva. The number of such icons, however, are very few.

The above comparison shows the stylistic difference between the Vishnu image of Hadigaon (Pl. 119), which is close to the Mathura-Kushana tradition, and the two Vishnu images from the Lucknow and Allahabad Museums (Pls. 123,124).

Another interesting Vishnu image may be referred to here from Tapahiti, Patan (Pl. 125). The image is very much damaged by erosion; nevertheless, one sees Vishnu standing in *samabhanga* pose. In his left hand is a conch and his right hand is held in *varadamudra*. His two rear hands are totally damaged and therefore it is not possible to establish their attributes. The god wears heavy earrings, a broad necklace and bracelets similar to the ornaments of the Solar Divinity from Kumbhesvara (Pl. 81). Looped across the thighs is a diagonal sash, the ends of which hang on either side. The arms are large and spread out on both sides, while the elbows are retracted, like the Vishnu image from Hadigaon (Pl. 119). Here again, the stance, iconographical traits and style of modelling indicate an early statue. The display of *varadamudra* and the representation of a diagonal sash are like the Hadigaon image of Vishnu. The image is so abraded

that a detailed study is not possible, hence the dating of this icon is difficult. However, there is a strong indication from its features that it is an early icon which could belong to the 4th century A.D.

A unique example of an early Vishnu image from Dhana Ganesa temple at Hadigaon was very recently discovered (Pl. 127). It should be recalled that in the same temple, an early relief of Mahisamardini (Pl. 59) and an image of Hayagriva (Pl. 145) were also found. The image in question is broken above the waist; therefore we are not in a position to furnish the details of the face, arms and other attributes. However we can still see that the left hand of the god holds a conch. The stylistic form and the modelling of the fleshy thighs recall the Mathura-Kushana tradition and in particular the image of Vishnu from the Mathura Museum (Pl. 126). He is clad in a dhoti which stops below the knees and has a semi-circular turn as seen in the Vishnu image from Hadigaon (Pl. 119) and in a number of Kushana images from India. Th most remarkable feature of this fragmentary sculpture is the thickly twisted sash tied on the left of his waist, a typical characteristic of Kushana art. On stylistic grounds, this sculpture may be assigned to the late 3rd century A.D.

There is yet another Vishnu image very recently discovered in a small shı. at Kumbhesvara temple precinct (Pl. 118). Like the early Vishnu images, details of the four-handed god are obliterated; however, a close study will reveal that he is holding a wheel and a mace in his rear right and left hands respectively. His front left hand is holding a conch while his front right hand is held in cupped *varadamudra* which shows a genetic relation with other early divinities of the valley. His broad shoulders and strong arms are characteristic of early sculptures. Though details of the garment are abraded, its pleats in decorative folds are faintly visible. All these features indicate an image which may belong to the 3rd-4th centuries A.D.

At a later date, this type of Vishnu image, standing alone, continued to be represented casually during the Thakuri, Malla and Shah periods. One example may be cited here from Naksal (Pl. 128). This four-handed god stands alone and has the usual emblems in his hands. His right front hand, though damaged, seems to be holding a boss while his left hand is holding a conch. The two rear right and left hands are holding a discus and mace respectively. Note that the standing Vishnu has a flame halo and the front pedestal, a floral design. Such motifs are completely absent in the early Vishnu image.

From the early 5th century A.D., the standing Vishnu, flanked by Laksmi and Garuda came into vogue and became quite popular. One such image may be cited here from Bhuvanesvara temple, Pasupati (Pl. 129). Here the god has four hands of which the rear two are broken. The front right hand is held in *varadamudra* in a peculiar position with a cupped palm, while the left hand is holding a conch. Note the broad, expansive shoulders of the god. The two strong, spreading arms with retracted elbows are reminiscent of the Solar Divinity from the National Museum, Kathmandu (Pl. 85). He is standing firmly erect with the feet close together. The lower parts of the feet are buried in the ground.

The god wears a dhoti reaching to slightly above the knees, the folds of which fall symmetrically between the thighs. Like other ancient male divinities the central folds of the dhoti are not shown here. A four-fold semi-circular sash is looped across the thighs. It must be observed that the design of the necklace, armlets, earrings and also the style of carving are similar to the Vishnu Vikranta image from Tilganga, Pasupati (Pl. 156). Behind his head is a plain halo, partly broken, with an incised outline border.

To the right of Vishnu stands a small figure of Laksmi whose head is awkwardly turned towards the god. The right hand of the goddess seems to be holding a lotus which is not very clear. To the left of Vishnu, the figure of Garuda is missing. Although the impact of the Gupta style is evident in the main figure, the figure of Laksmi shows an awkwardness in the treatment of details. This indicates the first attempt to place the figure of Laksmi on Vishnu's right. Hence this could be the earliest example of a Vishnu image to be found with Laksmi and Garuda. On stylistic grounds I am inclined to assign this image to the early 5th century A.D. This type of Vishnu image seems to have evolved as early as the 5th century and remained popular throughout the Thakuri, Malla and Shah periods. Images of similar iconography are not known from eastern India.

Another example of the fragmentary sculpture of Sridhara Vishnu from Naksal may be cited here (Pl. 130). The god is flanked by Laksmi on the right and Garuda on the left. The upper part of Vishnu above the waist is broken; however, a dhoti and a semi-circular sash looped across the thighs are present. Laksmi, who stands on Vishnu's right holds flowers in her right hand while in her left hand is the

end of her garment. Decorative pleats are also visible in the central fold of her garment, between the legs as well as on both sides of the goddess. She is wearing flat earrings, a necklace, bracelets, anklets and a beaded girdle. One can also see a plain halo with a line border behind her head. On the back of her neatly combed hair. is a floral design which could be a garland or some kind of ornament.

On the left of Vishnu stands Garuda who is slenderly built and has folded hands. He has curly hair and behind his head there is a plain halo like that of Laksmi on his right. He is wearing a loincloth instead of a dhoti. This kind of configuration at once establishes a difference between the early Licchavi sculptures and Thakuri or Malla sculptures. Note that this image is stylistically rather simple, with no floral design on the pedestal or flame halo behind the head. All these indicate an icon which can be assigned to the early 5th century A.D.

There is yet another example of a Vishnu image from Changu Narayana (Pl. 131). The figure of Vishnu above the waist is completely mutilated; however, in his right and left hands he holds a conch and a boss, respectively. At his right stands Laksmi on a lotus pedestal. She is shown holding the long stem of a large lotus, never seen before. To the left of Vishnu stands Garuda with folded hands. His face is also damaged. Like the Vishnu image from Naksal (Pl. 130), Vishnu and his attendants share a common and simple pedestal. Moreover, these two images are stylistically close to one another and therefore it is most likely that they both belong to the same period. Examples of this type of icon, belonging to the late Thakuri period, may be cited from Kirtipur (Pl. 132), Changu Narayana, Kathmandu and Patan.

Sesasayi Vishnu

An unusual and unique type of relief of Sesasayi Vishnu from Aryaghat, Pasupati (Pl. 135) has recently come to light. It is indeed one of those early icons where the unknown Nepalese artist has used not only a peculiar iconographic form but also remarkable inventiveness in the field of sculptural art. The relief is set in a niche in the wall of a shelter house at Aryaghat where the dying are taken for their last few hours of life.

The relief is delineated in diminutive form, only about twelve inches by sixteen inches. It is in a highly abraded state and also partly mutilated; hence to establish a proper identification of those divinities standing behind the recumbent Vishnu, or their attributes, is extremely difficult.

Vishnu sleeps on the coil of Ananta whose body seems to be half submerged in water, which is marked by some water level lines incised on the base of the relief. The god has only two hands. It is indeed a very rare iconic form, for not a single Vishnu image like this is so far known in Nepal. As both hands of the god are mutilated, it is not possible to establish the attributes.

Although the god is depicted reclining on the coil of the serpent Ananta, unlike the huge sculptures of Sesasayi Vishnu from Hanuman Dhoka or Budhanilkantha (Pl. 134), both datable to the 7th century A.D., this relief from Pasupati is tiny, and curiously, shown with some deities in the background. The head of Vishnu is sheltered by serpent hoods. The knees of the recumbent god are drawn slightly upwards and he rests comfortably on the serpent coil. A female figure, apparently Sri Laksmi, is seated on his lap, a very unusual feature. Of the two hands of Sri Laksmi the right one is held in *abhayamudra*, seen for the first time among the early Brahmanical icons in Nepal. The left hand of the goddess is resting on her thigh and appears to be holding something.

Another peculiar feature of this relief is Sri-Laksmi of a Gaja-Laksmi type. The usual form of Gaja-Laksmi is that of two elephants standing on a lotus pedestal on either side of the goddess with uplifted trunks holding an inverted jar from which they pour water over her head (Pls. 6, 9). However, in this relief from Pasupati, the seated goddess on Vishnu's lap is flanked by two Naginis, for the marks of snake hoods are partly visible. The Naginis are in the act of pouring water over the head of Sri-Laksmi from the inverted jars. Such icons have never before been known in Nepal nor can a parallel be cited in Indian sculpture. This peculiar iconographical formula is a unique example of the inventiveness of the Nepalese sculptor.

The concept of Gaja-Laksmi bathed by two elephants, a favourite theme for the artist, occurs frequently from the Sunga period onwards in coins, seals, terracotta and in the reliefs of Bharhut, Sanchi, Kausambi and other places in North India. The present relief, however, not only suggests a peculiar

iconography but also an early image. Behind the serpent hoods and on the left of Vishnu's head, one sees a standing figure which could be a *naga* king. His right hand is held in *abhayamudra*, while his left is mutilated, thus making it impossible to establish the attribute.

The feet of Vishnu rest on the coil of the serpent, and immediately behind stands a man with bulging eyes as if looking at the divine figure with bewilderment and stupefaction. Though it is described in the text, it is difficult to identify whether it is the figure of Markandeya or Bhrigu or one of the demons, either Madhu or Kaitabha. The textual evidence of Vishnu reclining on the coil of a serpent is found in the *Mahabharata*. However, an icon in this form belonging to the Kushana period is not known in Indian art.

A fine example of Sesasayi Vishnu from Deogarh, belonging to the 5th century, may be mentioned here. In sharp contrast to our relief from Pasupati (Pl. 135), the panel from Deogarh is elaborately carved with numerous divinities such as Brahma, Siva, Indra, Karttikeya and two demons, Madhu and Kaitabha.

Another example may be cited from the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay (Pl. 133). This relief, which is assignable to the 7th century A.D., is less crowded with divinities; however, in stylistic affinity and compositional treatment, it is distinct from the Sesasayi Vishnu of Pasupati. The Pasupati relief shows the *abhiseka* of Sri-Laksmi by two female *naga* deities, constituting an unusual example. To my knowledge this type of icon is not known in India.

On the basis of the above discussion we may conclude that the relief of Pasupati (Pl. 135) is undoubtedly one of the earliest and rarest icons found in Nepal and can be dated to the 2nd-3rd centuries A.D. The Sesasayi Vishnu referred to above and the standing Vishnu image from Hadigaon (Pl. 119) together prove that the Vaisnava cult was prevalent much earlier than is commonly thought by scholars.

Varaha

The cult of Varaha may go back to the Vedic or even pre-Vedic period. Rudra is equated with the boar of the sky. The etymology of Varaha with the cloud is well understood: "The earth is in accord with the cloud, yields corn to the hogs and animals." Thus in the *Atharva Veda* it is implied that the earth yields corn and riches to the people with the help of Varaha. In Brahmanic literature, too, his association with the earth is fully established in the concept of fertility. The legend of Varaha rescuing the earth goddess, Prithvi, is well-known. The earliest archaeological evidence of this god is the inscribed image of Varaha from the Mathura Museum (Pl. 139), datable to the Kushana period. Here the four-handed god, with his lower two arms akimbo, holds discs in his upper hands, representing perhaps the sun and the moon.

The theme of the Varaha avatara became quite popular from the Gupta period and numerous images of Varaha were carved in different periods in northern India. Among them, the colossal Varaha image from Udaigiri is well-known, for it is the largest and the most imposing ever carved in India. This unique image was produced during the rule of King Chandragupta II (A.D. 380-413).

In Nepal very few early images of Varaha are found and their antiquity may not be earlier than the end of the 4th or early 5th centuries. We may refer here to one such image from the bank of Siddhapokhari, Bhaktapur (Pl. 137). The god is standing with his right hand resting on his waist while the left is lifting the earth goddess Prithvi to the level of his shoulder. As conceived, the god has a massive and powerful form and, stylistically, seems to be derived from Mathura-Kushana art. His locks of curly hair are set in three waves, and spread over the left shoulder and arm. An additional sash is tied around the bulky abdomen, while its remaining parts fall on his right and make folds similar to those seen in the Seated Surya of Aryaghat (Pl. 86). The face is damaged but one can see his simple ornaments which consist of a beaded necklace, armlets and bracelets. In stark contrast, the 7th century Varaha of Dhumvarahi has a decorative necklace, bracelets, armlets and a flamed halo behind his head. From the point of view of anatomy, the image of Dhumvarahi (Pl. 136) looks rather disproportionate, for the lower part of the body is too short in comparison to the upper part. Though the artist has tried to portray the heroic manifestation of Vishnu showing his powerful form, it is not the best example of 7th century art. On the other hand, the Varaha of Siddhapokhari is very well proportioned, with a dynamic and powerful form.

The treatment of the plastic form is quite distinctive in the image of Varaha from Siddhapokhari, yet the coarse workmanship indicates that primitive elements still persisted. For instance, the manner in which the right foot of the god is abruptly turned appears rather awkward to the viewer. No artists of the Licchavi period or the Thakuri period would have attempted to compose in this manner. This obviously suggests an early attempt at the theme.

The details of the earth goddess, Prithvi, who is sitting on his left arm, are all lost; similarly, the face of the *naga* which is holding the left foot of the god in his palms, is abraded. However, the coil of the serpent is similar to that of Nagaraja from the Archaeological Garden (Pl. 73). Thus the image from Siddhapokhari has some early features, and on stylistic grounds may reasonably be assigned to the late 4th century A.D.

Mention must here be made of the famous Varahaksetra at the confluence of the rivers Kosi and Koka, situated in the south-eastern region of Nepal. The epigraphical record shows that this place was already known during the Gupta period and drew a large number of pilgrims from India, as it does even today. Every year thousands of pilgrims from India come in the month of Bhadra (August-September) to pay homage to the god. It is said in the *Varaha Purana*, "One who dies at the bank of Koka, is dear to me." At Varahaksetra, a number of shrines are dedicated to the god and images of Varaha belonging to a late period are found. Among them, however, a huge Varaha image preserved in a small shrine near the bank of the river Kosi deserves our attention (Pl. 138). This Varaha image was discovered about three decades ago during a landslide.

It would be relevant here to refer to the Damodarpur inscription of the time of Budha Gupta (*ca.*A.D 475-496). The inscription mentions a shrine dedicated to Sveta-Varaha-Svami and Kokamukha-Varaha-Svami, located in the Himalayas.[1] The *Mahabharata* and the Puranas only allude to Kokamukha-Svami, whereas the *Varaha Purana* gives a full account in a whole chapter devoted to Kokamukha-Svami. According to it, this was a holy place for pilgrimage. The area of five *yojanas* encompassed about twenty square miles where the followers of the Vaisnava faith lived. No wonder an image of Narasimha was recently discovered at Inurwa (Pl. 143), about eight miles from the confluence of the Kosi and Koka. This suggests that the whole area was inhabited by the Vaisnavas as early as the 5th century. The old name of the river Kosi, which flows all the way from the Himalayan mountains, is Kausiki, as it is known in the *Mahabharata*.

The god par excellence is standing with his left foot resting on the palms of a *naga* which is looking at the god in utter bewilderment and admiration (Pl. 138). The right foot of the god is placed on the coil of the serpent. The right arm is totally broken, but his fingers resting on the hip are visible. The left hand is placed firmly on his bent knee but the earth goddess, on his left shoulder, is conspicuously absent. A heavy rope-like twisted sash, similar to that of Karttikeya (Pl. 122) from Mathura Museum, belonging to the Kushana period, is tied around his huge abdomen; the remaining part falls on his right side. Rather than the ordinary dhoti, he is wearing an unusual type, of which the creases are gathered above the right knee and spread out slightly like that of Hari-Hara from Saugaltol (Pl. 147). His ornaments consist of bracelets, a broad necklace and a thin armlet.

The massive and powerful figure, with strong and heavy arms, displays a great sense of vigour and majestic splendour. The artist has so effectively treated this stone sculpture, which is almost five feet high, that it inspires a feeling of awe and wonder. The creation of this large and powerful sculpture suggests the popularity of the Vaisnava religion as early as the 5th century or even earlier in that remote area.

The figure of Naga, upon whose coil the god stands, raises his head and arms upwards, and lies on his belly. This appears to be an unusual composition. Two small figures with folded hands below the right foot of the god, the details of which are obliterated, may be either donors or devotees.

A sculpture of this immense proportion must have been carved on the spot and ritually installed rather than brought from a distant workshop. The style of carving and modelling in this image are close to the Varaha image of Udaigiri, India, which is a work of the early 5th century A.D.

[1] D.C. Sircar, "Kokamukha-tirtha , *The Indian Historical Quarterly,* vol XXI, no. 1, pp. 56ff.

Visvarupa Vishnu

Sometimes Nepal offers surprisingly new types of icons not known even in Indian art. The Visvarupa Vishnu from Kutubahal, Chabahil, (Pl. 141) is an example. Here, Vishnu is portrayed in his cosmic and universal manifestation as described in the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavadagita*. The image of Maha-Vishnu or Visvarupa Vishnu in his cosmic form is mentioned in Puranic literature, but no archaeological evidence of an image of this variety has come to light in Mathura-Kushana art. Until now it was generally held that the image of Visvarupa Vishnu from Changu Narayana temple precinct (Pl. 140) was the only existing example in the country. But persistent research has now established that the antiquity of this god may go back as far as the 3rd century A.D.

The image of Visvarupa from Kutubahal, Chabahil, is depicted with eight hands and is endowed with three heads and an additional one on top. The image has suffered from erosion; therefore details of the face, ornaments and attributes are not clear. Among the four right hands, the uppermost holds a discus, while the attributes of the two middle right hands are indistinguishable. The lower hand is definitely held in *varadamudra* with a cupped palm, similar to those of the Mother Goddesses (Pls. 19, 20) or that of the Hadigaon Vishnu (Pl.119) and many others. Of his four left hands the uppermost holds a mace and here again the modelling of the mace is similar to the Vishnu images from Rastriya Nachghar and Hadigaon (Pls. 65, 119). The attributes of the two middle left hands are not clear. However, the lower left hand of the god definitely holds a conch, rather diagonally, as seen in the Vishnu image of Hadigaon and Hari-Hara of Saugal (Pls. 119,147). This undoubtedly suggests an early image.

The god is wearing ornaments similar to those of the early sculptures. His dhoti is of an unusual type, stopping short a little above the knees, and is similar to that of the Solar Divinity from Kumbhesvara (Pl. 81), Hari-Hara from Saugal, Patan (Pl. 147) and Siva from Rastriya Nachghar (Pl. 64) and Balambu (Pl. 93).

A female figure with large breasts stands between the feet of Vishnu and holds the feet of the god in her hands. She may be identified as the personification of the Earth Goddess. The other figures on either side seem to be of Nagas, also holding Vishnu's feet and gazing at the divine manifestation in amazement. Two figures above the Nagas with folded hands look like female deities, but due to abrasion a detailed study is not possible.

A brief comparison may be drawn here between the Visvarupa Vishnu from Kutubahal and that of Changu Narayana. The stylistic traits of the Visvarupa Vishnu from Kutubahal (Pl. 141) are relatively simple, while the stele of Changu (Pl. 140) is more elaborate and crowded with divinities all around the image, a typical product of the late Licchavi period. Neither a flame border nor a sacred thread is seen in the Kutubahal image. Especially note that the crown of the god is similar to the Kushana style, whereas the crown of the Changu Narayana stele reveals an elaborate design signifying a later development. This is certainly one of the outstanding images of Nepal, and stylistically it is a work of the late 8th century. In contrast, the Visvarupa Vishnu image from Kutubahal shows simplicity of composition, heavy limbs and a massive body. Unlike the Changu Narayana version, neither Arjuna nor other gods witness the manifestation of Vishnu. Here, the figure of Vishnu alone dominates the whole composition.

A stone image of Visvarupa Vishnu is rare in Nepal. A fragmentary relief of this god may be briefly referred to here, described by Madanjit Singh under the title "Heavenly Court of Vishnu."[1] Though the main figure of Vishnu is missing, on the right side of the stele other gods witness the cosmic manifestation of Vishnu along with Arjuna who is holding a bow and an arrow. On his left, the standing figure of Sri-Laksmi is depicted, with two elephants, below the sitting gods. Though the composition of this relief seems to have been derived from the Changu Narayana relief (Pl. 140) its stylistic affinity is close to the Vishnu-Vikranta from Pharping or Narasimha from Changu Narayana which is probably a work of the 13th century and not of the 9th century A.D., as suggested by Singh.

Though the Mathura school was largely responsible for evolving the iconography of different gods, only one example of a Visvarupa Vishnu image datable to the late 4th or early 5th centuries has come to light. Here, Narasimha and Varaha are placed on the right and left respectively of Visvarupa Vishnu. The background of the stele is crowded with other divinities. Among them, the one on the left is

[1] Madanjit Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 189

displaying his right hand in *abhayamudra* and his head is haloed with serpent hoods. This could be a figure of Nagaraja and not Buddha as suggested by some scholars, for the association of *naga* with Vishnu is indisputable.

Not only the iconographic traits but also the style of modelling and treatment of the Visvarupa Vishnu image from Kutubahal, Chabahil (Pl. 141), suggest an early date. For instance, we find a very close similarity between his stance with legs planted firmly apart and that of Karttikeya from the Mathura Museum belonging to the Kushana period (Pl. 122); after all their hieratic disposition is the same. Also note the broad and massive shoulders, the retracted elbows, the display of *varadamudra* and the manner in which the left hand of the god holds the conch, all of which indicates an early work. On stylistic grounds a reasonable date for this relief would be the late 3rd century A.D.

Narasimha

According to the *Mahabharata*, Narasimha is also one of the incarnations of Vishnu. To protect the world the god is said to have assumed many different forms from time to time such as Varaha or Narasimha. The *Harivamsa* gives us a full account of the Narasimha *avatara*. To save the life of his ardent devotee, Prahlada, from persecution by the latter's father, Hiranyakasipu who was a demon, Vishnu assumed the form of Narasimha, half man and half lion, and killed the demon. As evidenced by a number of sculptures of Narasimha in India, the worship of the god seems to have been quite popular, particularly from the Gupta period onwards.

In the valley of Kathmandu, the earliest evidences of the worship of Narasimha go back to the 7th century. An inscription of Amsuvarman from Hadigaon mentions a temple of Narasimha for which a grant was made towards its maintenance. However, no image of the god seems to have survived nor does there exist any longer a temple of Narasimha. The image of this god found in the valley is from Changu Narayana precinct, datable to the 12th-13th centuries. In the relief, Vishnu, in the form of Narasimha, is tearing open the belly of the demon Hiranyakasipu who is lying helpless in his clutches. As it is a narrative stele, other divinities are also watching the battle: Sri-Laksmi and Garuda on the right; Prahlada on the left, and Brahma, Indra and Garuda emerging from the clouds above.

This example was the earliest relief of the subject so far known in the valley until the discovery of an image of Narasimha from Inurwa (Pl. 143), in south-eastern Nepal. This was much earlier than the above cited evidence and throws an interesting light on the antiquity of this god in Nepal. Depicted with four hands, he is standing in *samabhanga* pose. A plain halo behind his head is an early feature. He is clad in a dhoti which is secured by a rather narrow belt. Among his ornaments are a necklace consisting of large beads, armlets and bracelets. He is not wearing any kind of crown but we see a tuft of hair raised in the centre of his head while strands of hair fall on either side of his shoulders. The face, both lion and man, suggests a hybrid form that constitutes a Narasimha face. His shoulders and arms are massive, large and strong, while his torso is slimmer comparatively than the limbs. His front right hand is holding a round object which could be a fruit, while his left hand holds a conch. His rear right hand is resting on the mace and his rear left hand is placed on the *chakra*. Unlike an early sculpture, the feet of the god are close together.

Before we attempt to date this image, comparison with the counterpart in India would help us to postulate a reasonable date. We shall take an example from the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Varanasi, where two square pillars are almost identical. The god stands in erect posture with the feet close together and is adorned with *vanamala*. He is holding the usual emblems in the same manner as the Inurwa image of Narasimha (Pl. 143). In proportion, his head is slightly larger and the two front arms are shorter than the body. The style of carving and modelling may differ but the concept of the above-mentioned reliefs from Inurwa and the Bharat Kala Bhavan are basically the same, and the manner in which the sculptor has treated the god is identical.

Regarding the date of this Inurwa Narasimha Rameshjung Thapa, who first published an account of the image, has suggested a 4th century date.[1] If the relief from the Bharat Kala Bhavan hasbeen

[1] Rameshjung Thapa, "Inurwako Narasimha", (Narasimha of Inurwa), *Ancient Nepal*, Journal of the Department of Archaeology, no. 40, July 1977, pp. 57-58, Kathmandu.

accepted as a 5th century one, we hesitate to assign the Inurwan image to the 4th century A.D. The stance of the Inurwa image does not indicate a 5th century product nor does the style of iconographic formula support the date. In comparison to the ancient images, the treatment of modelling is far different from the 4th century image, for it shares neither of the similar features or early iconographic traits. On stylistic grounds, therefore, the image from Inurwa cannot be older than the image of Bharat Kala Bhavan, hence a reasonable date would be the 6th century A.D.

Hayagriva

Yet another example of a rare icon, unnoticed before, is the image of Hayagriva from Dhana-Ganesa temple at Hadigaon (Pl. 145). Though a minor incarnation of Vishnu, it is of very ancient origin. The reference to this god is found in the *Mahabharata.* According to Puranic literature, Vishnu assumed the form of Hayagriva, a horse-headed man, and rescued the Vedas stolen by the demons, Madhu and Kaitabha. He is also called Hayamukha, having the head of a horse.

Very few sculptures of Hayagriva are known from India and most of them belong to the Gupta period. So far as the icon of this god is concerned, to my knowledge the image of Hayagriva from Dhana-Ganesa temple, Hadigaon, is the only one among the ancient sculptures of Nepal. Nor is any representation of this god seen in medieval sculpture. However, in Buddhist sculpture, particularly in metal images or in paintings, Hayagriva is frequently shown as an emanation of Akshobhya.

Here the god is sitting with his right knee resting on the pedestal of a huge lotus and the folded left knee supporting his left elbow. Both his arms are broken, making it difficult to establish his attributes. He is slightly pot-bellied and his *dhoti* is secured by a thin belt with a chain-like design. The central folds of the garment between his thighs spill out on the dais. Even a casual glance shows his massive form and broad shoulders. A noteworthy feature is the scantiness of ornamentation. With the exception of the short necklace, his body is almost bare. Furthermore, the absence of his sacred thread is conspicuous. The detail of the face, which is that of a horse, is obliterated through abrasion

Dating this image would be very difficult for there are no other images of Hayagrivas comparable to this one in early Nepalese sculpture. However, a few icons of this god are found in Indian art. An example may be cited here from Bharat Kala Bhavan (Pl. 144) where the four-handed god is sitting cross-legged. He is depicted as a horse-headed god with his mane flowing in front of the forehead and sides. He is holding a wheel in his rear left hand while his rear right hand has a mace in an upside-down position. He holds a conch in his front left hand but the object in his front right hand is indistinguishable. This image appears to be slightly earlier than the one from Hadigaon (Pl.145) for it is characterised by bulky volume. On this basis we may assign the Bharat Kala Bhavan image to the early 5th century A.D. and the Hadigaon image to the late 5th or early 6th centuries A.D.

Hanuman

The *Ramayana* of Valmiki has long had a great impact on the people of India and Nepal. Yet no cult image of Rama belonging to the Kushana period has ever been found. Only during the later period, various episodes relating to the life of Rama have been profusely illustrated in stone carvings and wall paintings as well as in manuscripts. Rama is considered to be one of the incarnations of Vishnu, yet his worship in Nepal does not seem to have been widely prevalent during the Licchavi period. We have, however, a single small relief depicting a scene from the *Ramayana*, set in one of the walls of the terraces of Kailasa, above the Pasupati temple. Here Rama is shown with his wife Sita and brother Laksmana. On stylistic evidence the work seems to be a product of the 9th century. In India on the other hand, *Ramayana* scenes are depicted on the panels of the plinth of Dasavatara temple at Deogarh datable to the 5th century.[1] In these panels, scenes like the exile of Rama, Sita and Laksmana, the transformation of Ahalya, and Laksmana mutilating Surpanakha are beautifully represented. Special attention must be given,

[1] Kalpana Desai, *Iconography of Vishnu*, New Delhi, Abhinav Publications, 1973, pp. 116-117, figs. 80, 81.

however, to a very interesting image of Hanuman from Sikhara Narayana, Pharping, which was recently discovered and has never before been studied.

Surprisingly, the cult of Hanuman, the ardent devotee of Rama, became very popular only from the late Malla period in Nepal. A stone sculpture of Hanuman, the monkey-god, near the gate of the old palace of Kathmandu is very well known; hence the palace gate itself is called Hanuman Dhoka. The image is covered with red cloth and is also thickly coated with red colour which is the result of smearing oil and vermilion powder over it during the veneration of the god. Another image of Hanuman, also thickly coated with oil and vermilion powder, stands not very far from the temple complex of Hanuman Dhoka opposite a huge bell. Both these images bear inscriptions and dates, according to which they were installed by King Pratap Malla, in the year Vikram Samvat 1729 (corresponding to A.D. 1672).[1] Hanuman is considered to be the protecting deity, hence the Malla kings of Bhaktapur and Patan also placed his images in their palace complexes.

The image of Hanuman from Pharping (Pl. 146) is still preserved in a fairly good condition, except for one of the lower left hands which is broken. It is badly abraded and details, like many early sculptures, are almost worn-out. The eight-handed deity is depicted in a flying posture with the toes of his right foot firmly planted on a rock while the left is folded and lifted up as if the deity is ready to fly, perhaps in search of Sita. Two of his rear hands hold a long garland resembling a *vanamala* which hangs from the top of the head to the knees. Attributes of the four other hands are not clear but they seem to be held as clenched fists, while one of the lower right hands is holding a garland.

The deity is wearing enormous earrings like those of the Mother Goddesses from Kotaltol (Pl. 15) or Vaisnavi from Kirtipur (Pl. 37). One can also see a broad necklace, though details are obliterated, and simple bracelets on the hand. He is clad in a simple dhoti whose central folds are neatly pleated into a decorative fold like those seen in a number of early images. These are motifs which are definitely early features.

Right in front of Hanuman is a Siva Linga; behind it sits Nandi, the bull. This is another peculiar and enigmatic iconographical trait of Nepalese sculpture that cannot be explained. In front of Hanuman's right foot kneels a female figure who seems to be either offering something or holding the base of the pedestal.Two small figures below his left foot, apparently monkeys, are kneeling with folded hands. The left foot of Hanuman seems to be worshipped by a kneeling monkey.

The lower half of the relief is largely accentuated with a rock design which is done rather crudely, suggesting also an early stage in the motif's evolution. In the Uma-Mahesvara panel from Mrigasthali (Pl. 111), datable to the 5th-6th centuries A.D., we have already seen a very simple type of rock design. However, in another panel of Uma-Mahesvara from Amarkantesvara (Pl. 113), assignable to the 8th century, there is a very highly stylized form of rock design. The study of rock motifs may also help us to postulate the dates of ancient images. The composition as a whole and particularly the style of carving the toes in this relief, is close to Vishnu-Vikranta of Lazimpat, now housed in the National Museum, Kathmandu (Pl. 155).

The relief is undoubtedly one of the peculiar icons found in Nepal whose stylistic treatment is quite baffling which makes it more difficult to decide its age. But one thing is certain: this type of icon was not seen in the Licchavi or Thakuri period. Most probably it belongs to the late 5th century A.D.

The above discussion will give a clear picture of the evolution of Vaisnava art in Nepal. The discovery of a number of Vishnu images from Kumbhesvara (Pl. 118), Hadigaon (Pls. 119, 127), Tapahiti (Pl. 125), Sesasayi Vishnu from Pasupati (Pl. 135) and Visvarupa Vishnu from Kutubahal (Pl. 141) throw an interesting light on the development of the Vaisnava cult in Nepal, the origins of which may go as far back as the 2nd century A.D.

[1] Gautam Vajracharya, *Hanuman Dhoka Rajdurbar*, Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies, Kathmandu, V.S. 2033, p. 86.

Hari-Hara

In the Puranas, Vishnu (Hari) is regarded as a form of Siva (Hara) and Siva as that of Vishnu. In this conjoined form Siva always occupies the right half and Vishnu the left half. It is mentioned in the *Harivamsa* that Vishnu is Siva and Siva is Vishnu. The *Vamana Purana* and *Matsya Purana* give a full description of the composite god, Hari-Hara or Siva-Narayana. This is indeed a fusion of the two great gods, Vishnu and Siva. Although no mythological reference to this god can be cited, there is ample literary evidence pertaining to the animosity and rivalry that existed between the followers of these two different sects, Vaisnava and Saiva.

The composite figure of Hari-Hara was first evolved in the Mathura-Kushana period. Two stone heads discovered at Girdharpur Tila near Mathura clearly show the *jata-mukuta* of Siva on the right and the crown of Vishnu on the left. These reliefs are identified as the figures of Hari-Hara belonging to the Kushana period, which also attest to the prevalence of his worship in north India.

Gupta seals were also discovered at Nalanda on which the god is shown holding a trident on his right and a *chakra* on his left. Another specimen of a Hari-Hara image belonging to the Gupta period is from the Allahabad Museum (Pl. 148). As usual, the left is represented by Vishnu and the right by Siva. Vishnu is holding a conch in his upper left hand while the lower left hand is resting on the head of a figure which may be identified as Chakra Purusha. The upper right hand of Siva is holding some object which is not very distinct, most probably a rosary, as seen in the Hari-Hara image of the Patna Museum datable to the 5th century A.D.; the lower left hand of Siva is resting on the head of Trisula Purusha.

In the post-Gupta and medieval periods, numerous images of Hari-Hara were made. Rao has profusely illustrated and described the icons of Hari-Hara belonging to different periods.

In Nepal, two great cults, Saivism and Vaishnavism, evolved and expanded during the early centuries of the Christian era. The synthesis of the two cults with the spirit of tolerance, inspired the concept of the conjoined figures of Vishnu and Siva. The earliest epigraphical as well as archaeological evidence of a Hari-Hara icon in Nepal is recorded in an inscription of the Licchavi period at Deo Patan, near Pasupati Temple. According to the inscription, one Svamivartta consecrated a composite image of Sankara Narayana Svami in the year Saka Samvat 487, corresponding to A.D. 565. However, the present image of Hari-Hara (Pl. 151) is not the original sculpture consecrated by Svamivartta. It is a work of the late Malla period, and not earlier than the 17th century. Needless to say the present Hari-Hara image is the replacement of the original which must have been damaged or mutilated. This epigraphical evidence, dated A.D., 565 shows that the cult of Hari-Hara was quite popular during the Licchavi period. Our research however, has established the fact that the cult of Hari-Hara was still older than the 6th century and that its antiquity may go back to at least the 3rd century A.D.

There is an outstanding image of Hari-Hara found in a small shrine at Saugal, Patan (Pl. 147). The composite figure of the god has massive and powerful limbs that could only be found in an early image. Both the iconography and the modelling indicate early features. Furthermore, icons of this type, which may be attributed to the Licchavi period, have never been found.

This god stands in *samapada sthanaka* posture with the feet set apart and firmly planted on a simple pedestal which is identical to the image of Vishnu from Hadigaon (Pl. 119) of the 3rd century A.D. The image is worn out from centuries of daily ritual baths by devotees pouring water over the deity's head. This has done considerable damage to the image, hence details of the hairdo, ornaments, face, as well as the attributes are badly abraded. Nevertheless, a close study will reveal its identity.

Here the left half of the figure represents Vishnu (Hari) who is holding a discus in the rear left hand, and a conch in the front left hand, in a manner identical to that of Vishnu of Hadigaon (Pl. 119). The right half represents Siva (Hara) who is in his usual *urdhvareta* form. The god has a trident with a long handle in his upper right hand which is resting on the pedestal and his lower right hand is held in *varadamudra,* again in a similar awkward manner as seen in the Vishnu image of Hadigaon (Pl. 121). This stylistic unity suggests the workmanship of the same atelier. Some early features are the type of earrings he is wearing similar to those worn by Vaisnavi of Kirtipur (Pl. 37) and the Solar Divinity of Kumbhesvara (Pl. 81). The torso of the god is bare except for the necklace which is abraded. The design of the bracelets is very close to that of Vishnu of Hadigaon (Pl. 119.)

One peculiar feature in this image is the type of dhoti which the god is wearing. It looks as though it is slightly spread out on both sides above the knees, yet the central folds of the dhoti are gathered between the legs and fall in a zigzag pattern. In Nepal this unusual type of dhoti appears in the image of Visvarupa from Kutubahal (Pl. 141). The dhoti seems to have been firmly secured by a girdle. Besides this, an additional sash runs diagonally across the thighs and makes a loop around the conch on the left before it falls to the level of the pedestal. On both sides, the remaining parts of the sash are folded into decorative pleats. The diagonal sash is an ubiquitous feature of the early images of Nepal.

In ancient days a sash was an integral part of Indian dress. A sash running diagonally from left to right or vice-versa, above or below the knees, is a common feature in ancient sculptures. Examples are Gaja-Laksmi of Naihiti (Pl. 7), the Solar Divinity of Kumbhesvara (Pl. 81), Siva of Balambu (Pl. 93), and Brahma, Siva and Vishnu of Rastriya Nachghar (Pls. 63,64,65). But this type of sash completely disappears from the 4th century onwards and is replaced by a semi-circular type, commonly found in the images of the Licchavi, Thakuri and Malla periods, especially on standing figures of Vishnu, Siva and Surya. Before we attempt to establish the date of this image from Saugal (Pl. 147), we shall refer to a few other Hari-Hara images for a comparative study.

There is a figure of Hari-Hara at Balaju (Pl. 149) opposite the shrine of Hariti. There the god is standing erect, flanked by Laksmi on the left and Parvati on the right. The three divinities stand on lotus pedestals. The left half of the main figure is Vishnu who holds a discus and a conch in his rear and front hands, respectively. The right half of the main figure is Siva who has a trident and a rosary in his rear and front hands. The modelling of the figure of Hari-Hara with a decorative flame halo behind the head is very close to that of Vishnu from Naksal and Changu Narayana, datable to the 10th-11th centuries. In contrast, Hari-Hara of Saugal is standing on a simple dais. He is neither flanked by Laksmi Parvati nor is there a halo behind his head. The flamed halo is a later development, the antiquity of which in Nepal may not be earlier than the 7th century A.D., as cited already.

There is another image of Hari-Hara at Kumbhesvara water-fountain; here, the god is flanked by four figures, Laksmi, Parvati and two attendants, stylistically suggesting a work of the 12th-13th centuries. Hence there is very little likeness between this image and that of Saugal (Pl. 147). We may cite yet another example of a Hari-Hara image from Pasupati (Pl. 151) already discussed. In this image the attributes of the god are the same as those of the Balaju Hari-Hara (Pl. 149), but the style of modelling and delineation of the lotus design and dresses of the female divinities suggest a work of the 17th century A.D. (Pl. 151).

Apart from the images of Balaju, Kumbhesvara and Deo Patan there is yet another image of Hari-Hara at Narayanachaur, Kathmandu, where the god stands alone in *samabhanga* pose (Pl. 150). Curiously, the same iconographical traits seen in the Hari-Hara image of Saugal (Pl. 147) persist in the image of Narayanachaur. However, in treatment and modelling, the two images are miles apart. In the later image from Narayanachaur, the treatment of the heavy limbs and the monumentality are completely lacking. Also, the dress, ornaments and halo around the entire image indicate the style of a much later period, datable to the 13th-14th centuries.

We have noted in the above discussion how the image of Hari-Hara evolved and how the

ornamental elements were gradually introduced over the centuries. We have also observed that the earlier the image, the simpler the modelling. As already indicated, the modelling and erect posture of the image of Hari-Hara of Saugal (Pl. 147) in general, and the style of holding the conch in particular, are close to the image of Vishnu of Hadigaon (Pl. 119). Notably, the display of *varadamudra* in both images is identical and reminds one of the Mother Goddess of Haugal-Bahal (Pl. 19) and Kumari of Balkhu (Pl. 20). Furthermore, the very manner in which the god is standing is similar to the image of the Mathura-Kushana period (Pls. 108, 122). Though Pal has briefly discussed and compared the image of the Saugal Hari-Hara (Pl. 147) with the "monumental Vaisnava sculptures of the Licchavi period"[1] and dated it to the 7th century A.D., on stylistic grounds, however, this becomes difficult to accept, for not a single Vaisnava sculpture of this type belonging to the Licchavi period has ever been found nor is there any sculpture of the Thakuri or Malla period which has a close affinity with the Saugal Hari-Hara. In fact, by the 7th century, the plastic art of Nepal had already reached its zenith. The sculptures of this period have the most sensitive form. An iota of difference in a curve or a pose would change the entire balance of the sculpture. Examples of such work are found in the Licchavi Chaita from Dhokabahal, Kaliyadamana from Hanuman Dhoka, Sesasayi Vishnu from Budhanilakantha, Jamuna from Pasupati and Siva friezes from Kathesimbhu and Kankesvari. They all belong to the 7th century and represent the best examples of Licchavi art. In contrast, the Saugal stele is bulky and massive in the Mathura-Kushana tradition. An image of such distinct character undoubtedly belongs to an early group and therefore a more reasonable date would be the 3rd century A.D.

Even in India, Hari-Hara images belonging to the Kushana period are rare. A fragmentary relief of Hari-Hara assignable to the Kushana period and discovered at Girdharpur Tila near Mathura has already been referred to. Only from the 5th century onwards have images of Hari-Hara frequently been carved in north India. In view of this, it now becomes evident that the Hari-Hara from Saugal is a unique piece.

[1] P. Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

Miscellaneous Sculptures

Among the wealth of unidentified ancient sculptures, at least two images attract our attention. The identity and antiquity of both are extremely difficult to establish. One is a female torso from a small shrine of Bacchalesvara, Pasupati (Pl. 153), and the other is an unidentified figure from Mrigasthali (Pl. 152).

In 1964 when the female torso was first discovered, the local people revered it as *syaladevata,* the jackal god. Why this female torso was thus identified, is difficult to explain. There is, however, a belief among the Tantriks that *syaladevata* is a manifestation of the goddess Bhagavati. The torso is highly abraded; the head, arms and legs are missing. Furthermore, this female nude has signs of neither garments nor ornaments on her body. If housed in any modern art gallery, this piece would have been taken as the work of a modern sculptor like Brancusi or Henry Moore. (Later this image was lost or stolen as were many others from the valley.) As it was badly mutilated, the projecting parts on each side of the waist indicate almost nothing. It is possible that the right hand was held in *varadamudra*. The breasts are small but firm, the hips are broad and expanded, while the figure stands with her feet apart. Neither is there any attribute nor any significant iconography which will help us to identify this torso. Therefore, it is not possible to date it in the present state. Pal has, however, dated it to the 4th-5th centuries with a question mark, without offering any convincing argument for this date.[1] One thing is clear: no image of this type has ever come to light. Because of the highly abraded condition, it is also possible that this female torso was lying on the bed of the nearby Bagmati river, perhaps for centuries.

Another equally enigmatic sculpture is the unidentified image at Mrigasthali (Pl. 152). It is set up on the wall and is so highly abraded that no detail whatsoever is visible. Though it appears to be a male figure standing upright in an erect posture with the feet slightly apart, the identity remains obscure. The image is carved on black limestone and the texture of the sculpture is smooth and metallic. From the modelling it is certain that it is an image of a two-handed divinity with a crown on the head. The possibility of its being an unfinished sculpture cannot be ruled out. At the same time, it must be remembered that only running water of a river or stream can cause such smooth weathering on stone after several centuries. Although an ancient icon, the age of this baffling sculpture is impossible to ascertain.

[1] P. Pal, *op. cit*, p. 58, fig. 86.

The Dating and Stylistic Problem of Early Sculptures

The preceding chapters have shown in detail that the early sculptures of the valley of the Bagmati have some distinct character and iconographical traits which are not seen in the sculptures of later periods. Mathura was the primary source of inspiration for the early art of Nepal and has been hinted at by some scholars, and this becomes clearer as more specimens of early Nepalese sculpture are unearthed. Now it is practically certain that there existed a close stylistic affinity between the early art of Nepal and that of the Kushana period. Not only the iconographical formulae but also the drapery, coiffure, display of *mudras* and ornaments worn by the divinities, and their stance, attest to this.

In order to establish the chronological evolution of the early sculptures of Nepal and to postulate their date, we have compared them with their counterparts in India. On the following pages we shall again emphasize some of the peculiar iconographical forms and features characteristic of early sculptures.

Let us first note how *varadamudra* is displayed in the early images. As described earlier, the right hand of the male or female divinity displayed in *varadamudra* looks rather awkward because the fingers are long and disproportionate, and the palm is shown cupped, indeed a very distinctive feature related only to early art. Examples of female divinities are the Mother Goddesses from Haugal-Bahal and Balkhu (Pls. 19, 20), and of male divinities, Vishnu of Hadigaon (Pl. 119), Siva of Balambu (Pl. 93), Hari-Hara of Saugal (Pl. 147), Visvarupa Vishnu of Kutubahal (Pl. 141), and Vasuki and Vishnu of Kumbhesvara (Pls. 69, 118). They all have the same peculiar trait carved in similar style. In sharp contrast, no Brahmanical deities of a later period have such features. However, in later periods the right hand, though held in a similar posture, holds a round object which could be a fruit or a seed of the lotus. This motif seems to have been in vogue in the sculptural art of Nepal only from the later part of the 4th century A.D., and becomes a common symbol in both the Hindu and Buddhist sculptures throughout the Licchavi, Thakuri, Malla and Shah periods. However, it is interesting to note that *varadamudra* is displayed only by male figures in Buddhist sculpture. For example, the standing Buddha from Bangemura, datable to the late 5th century, and Avalokitesvara of Ganabahal belonging to the 6th century[1] hold the right hand in *varadamudra*, but in style and treatment they are distinct from the early version.

It is worth observing, though, that all the divinities belonging to the Kushana period in India show the right hand in *abhayamudra* a gesture of assurance. In Nepal, with the single exception of the figures in Sesasayi Vishnu from Pasupati (Pl. 134), no Brahmanical icon has the right hand in *abhayamudra*.

Another curious feature of the early sculptures is the hair-style of the female divinities. The Gaja-Laksmi of Naihiti (Pl. 7), the Mother Goddess from Kotaltol (Pl. 15), Hariti from Balaju (Pl. 55) and many others have their hair tightly drawn into a distinctive central bun from which two tresses fall on either side. At least ten female divinities have such a hair-style (Figs. 18-25).

[1] P. Pal, *op. cit.*, figs. 8, 167.

Besides the above, we see another hair-style in some other female deities, namely, the Mother Goddess from Haugal-Bahal Pl. 19), Vaisnavi from Kirtipur (Pl. 37) and the female attendant of the Solar Divinity from Kumbhesvara (Pl. 84). The hair of these female figures seems to have been neatly combed and parted in the middle, showing wavy lines on both sides of the forehead (Figs. 28-31); the centre is slightly raised in an oblong shape, which could be some kind of ornament attached to the hair according to the prevailing fashion of those days. A close scrutiny of the hair-style of these female figures represents a distinct style depicted only in early sculptures. We do not come across these in any female deity of the Licchavi, Thakuri or Malla periods.

Still another interesting feature in these early images is the pleats of their garments. These folds are neatly arranged and delineated as a beautiful design. Such motifs are frequently seen in male and female figures particularly in the Mother Goddesses. An example is the Mother Goddess from Haugal-Bahal (Pl. 19) whose garment in the centre is gathered into pleats of a decorative fold over the supporting seat (Fig. 36). Though the stylistic innovation of the Nepalese sculpture seems to characterize a native tradition infused by an indigenous aesthetic, yet the motif seems to have been borrowed from Mathura or western Indian art of the Kushana or even earlier period. Although somewhat similar, the use of such a decorative fold of the garment appears to have been first evolved in the Yaksha image of Parkham, datable to the 3rd century B.C., regarded as one of the earliest images in India (Pl. 4). Here, the folds of the garment between the legs form a zigzag pattern, composing a beautiful design of pleats (Fig. 32). If not identical, similar pleats arranged in decorative folds are found on the Yakshi and Yaksha figures from Bharhut belonging to the 2nd or 1st centuries B.C. (Figs. 33,34). In these examples the pleats of the garment are arranged between the legs in a multifold pattern. However, by the 1st century A.D., instead of multifold pleats, a distinctive style of folding seems to have been evolved, as seen in the *mithuna* couple standing in a panel on the facade of a rock-cut Buddhist cave at Karle, and unlike the multifold pleats, these pleats are arranged in only two stages (Fig. 35), in exactly the same way as seen in a number of images of the Mother Goddess or early icons (Figs. 36-48). Though a favourite motif with Nepalese sculptors, it gradually changes from the 4th century onwards and is replaced by a highly stylized multifold design as depicted in the Vishnu-Vikranta image from Changu Narayana and the image of Devi from Deo Patan,[1] now in a private collection in the U.S. Both of these are datable to the 7th century. After the Thakuri period the stylized folds of the garment become a common feature, both in stone and bronze.

Another pre-Licchavi feature is the manner in which the sash is worn. For instance, all the male and female divinities of the early period wear a slightly diagonal sash which is indeed characteristic of early icons. Examples are the Solar Divinity from Kumbhesvara (Pl. 81), Siva from Balambu (Pl. 93), four divinities from the Rastriya Nachghar (Pls. 63-66) and many others. In later periods the same sash is shown as a symmetrical loop across the thighs. This seems to have evolved from the 4th century and was used continuously up to the Shah period.

Among the ornaments, the earrings worn by male and female divinities deserve special attention. Some similar designs of earrings appear to have been derived from Mathura-Kushana art, for instance, the one worn by Gaja-Laksmi from Naihiti (Pl.7) and that of Laksmi from the Mathura Museum (Pl. 5). The artists of Nepal have created various types of earrings which differ in size and shape, but most of them are enormous and heavy. Because of their size they seem to make gaping holes in the ear-lobes, such as in the image of Hariti from Balaju (Pl. 55), the Solar Divinity from Kumbhesvara (Pl. 81), and the Mother Goddess from Kotaltol (Pl. 15). In contrast, Hariti from Balaju has a pair of earrings of *amalaka* shape which may also be considered characteristic of early sculpture. This type of earring is found again in only two other images: the Solar Divinity from Mrigasthali, now preserved in the National Museum, Kathmandu (Pl. 85), and Virupaksha from Aryaghat (Pl. 98), both datable to the late 4th century. Still another flat type of ear ornament, *patrakundala,* occurs in the images of Siva (Pl.95) and Mahesvari (Pl. 43), both from Kirtipur. This type of ornament was again copied by sculptors of later dates.

Most of the female divinities mentioned already wear massive anklets as an ubiquitous symbol of beauty and grace, for example, Hariti from Balaju (Pl. 55), the Mother Goddess from Haugal-Bahal (Pl. 19), Vaisnavi from Kirtipur (Pl. 37) and almost all the early female figures. In Kushana art, too, female figures frequently wear massive anklets. In Nepal, anklets used to be an important ornament among

[1] P. Pal, *op. cit.,* figs. 3, 85.

Newari as well as Kirati (Rais and Limbus) women until a few decades ago. In addition, womenfolk of other groups also wear anklets. In comparison with the early icons, not a single image of a later period has these massive anklets.

It must be noted further that in the early images of a Mother Goddess, a plain halo behind the head was invariably shown. Such haloes have neither an incised outline on the border nor a flame design. It was followed by a halo with incised outline, as seen in the Uma-Mahesvara panel from Kumbhesvara (Pl. 110), Vishnu-Vikranta from Tilganga (Pl. 155) and Brahma from Chapagaon. These are images datable to the 5th and 6th centuries, respectively. A halo with the flame design seems to have been evolved only from the beginning of the 7th century in Nepal.

In early sculptures, a rock design is conspicuously absent. Only artists of the Licchavi and Thakuri or even later periods used the rock design and flame halo as a sculptural accent.

No early male divinity is ever seen wearing *Yajnopavita*, the sacred thread. The use of the sacred thread in Nepalese sculpture is a later development. It is difficult to explain why in Kushana art, too, of a large number of images, only five are shown with the sacred thread.[1] To sum up, all ancient sculptures prior to the 5th century, have distinct stylistic features quite different from the later period. And to some extent these specific characters also indicate an indigenous tradition which was prevalent in the early centuries of the Christian era.

Till now, some scholars have considered only a few sculptures, particularly from Mrigasthali and Aryaghat (Pls. 86, 98) as stray examples of early sculpture and accepted them to be only isolated specimens.[2] However, the recent discovery of Gaja-Laksmi from Naihiti (Pl.7), Sesasayi Vishnu from Pasupati (Pl. 135), Visvarupa Vishnu from Kutubahal (Pl. 141), Mahisamardini from Hadigaon (Pl. 59), Vishnu from Patan and Hadigaon (Pls. 118, 119), Hariti from Balaju (Pl. 55) and Mother Goddesses from Balkhu, Kirtipur, Jaibagesvari, Haugal-Bahal and Hadigaon, give unmistakeable evidence of early images in which early iconographical traits, form and style are close to Mathura-Kushana art. This cannot be denied. It must be accepted that there is a marked difference between these early icons and those of the Licchavi period beginning from the earliest dated images (A.D. 467) from Lazimpat and Tilganga (Pls. 155, 156). As yet, no attempt to formulate a chronological framework of these ancient images on the basis of iconographical forms, traits and stylistic evolution has been made.

For the first time the icon of Gaja-Laksmi (Pl. 7), hitherto unknown in Nepal, has been discovered. Its very representation, style and iconographic traits suggest an early image, and the nearest parallel would be Gaja-Laksmi from Kausambi (Pl. 9), datable to the 1st century B.C. Likewise, a number of divinities such as Sesasayi Vishnu (Pl. 135), Visvarupa Vishnu (Pl. 141), Mahisamardini (Pl. 59) and a number of Mother Goddesses have been dealt with for the first time, whose ancient traits and iconography are close to Kushana art.

The torso of Yaksha from Hadigaon (Pl. 1), datable to the 1st century A.D. and considered to be the earliest image so far discovered in the valley of the Bagmati, is certainly a work of a great master who must have been well acquainted with the tradition of Mathura-Kushana art. This unique torso of Yaksha, and other divinities already mentioned, cannot be accepted as isolated examples cited at random, for these early sculptures owe much to the ancient tradition of Kushana art, whose parallels have already been discussed.

Mathura was indeed one of the most important centres of sculptural art during the Kushana rule, the first three centuries of the Christian era. Mathura artists have made a great contribution in evolving Brahmanical images. Besides creating the Buddha images, different divinities of the Brahmanical pantheon such as Vishnu, Laksmi, Gaja-Laksmi, Mahisamardini, Siva, Karttikeya, Ardhanarisvara, Naga, Kubera, Yaksha, Yakshi, and the Saptamatrikas were made, and their iconographic forms were established for the first time in the Kushana period.

The impact of the Mathura-Kushana school was widely felt in the whole of north India during Kushana rule. It is little wonder that its influence reached Nepal and inspired the artists continuously for more than four centuries. Though secluded in their Himalayan setting, the artists of Nepal were remarkably receptive as well as inventive in devising their own iconic form and style. This is especially true

[1] N.P. Joshi, "Iconography of Vishnu in Pre-Gupta Period", *Bulletin of Museums and Archaeology in U.P.*, Lucknow, no.2, pp. 6-25.
[2] P.R. Sharma, "Introduction to Nepalese Art and Architecture", *Nepal—A Profile*, Kathmandu, Nepal Council of Applied Economic Research, 1970, p.72.

in the works of the second half of the 4th century, marked by a new type, of which the original element is clearly apparent in two sculptures, Virupaksha from Aryaghat (Pl. 98) and the Solar Divinity from Mrigasthali (Pl. 85). These two icons are accentuated by a strong ethnic element that may be termed a native style. Both images bear distinct Mongoloid features which obviously suggest the indigenous aesthetic character. Among other ancient sculptures, the Seated Surya from Aryaghat (Pl. 86) and Vasuki from Kumbhesvara (Pl. 70) also have a slight Mongoloid character. The high cheekbones and the flat treatment of their faces attest to this new element. All four sculptures belong to the 4th century A.D.

An attempt has been made to identify most of the early sculptures of the valley on the basis of iconography and in comparison with their counterparts in India. Yet some remain unidentified, mainly due to their mutilated condition and abrasion, and also to enigmatic iconographical features.

Though it does not come in the same category, mention must be made of a peculiar image which stands near Bankali temple at Pasupati (Pl. 154). A human head is carved on the top of a shaft, but it is not a *mukhalinga*, though it is fixed on a recently carved *jalahari,* the usual base of the Siva-Linga as a liquid container. The face is elongated and also very crudely modelled with unusually long, arched eyebrows, large open eyes without pupils, a flat nose and tight compressed lips. The chin is conspicuously short. It has a V-shaped tuft of beard and looks rather odd and unnatural. Long strands of hair fall on either side of the face while the top of the head is covered by curly hair. Moreover, a crudely delineated necklace designed as lotus petals is clearly visible below the chin; Pal has mistakenly assumed this to be "a human head emerging from a lotus".[1] The crude version of this sculpture has no stylistic affinity with any of the ancient icons nor is there any example in later periods which is comparable. Pal has fully discussed the style and modelling of this image comparing it with that of Virupaksha (Pl. 98), particularly the treatment of the eyes, and has assigned it to the 4th century or earlier with a question mark.[2] However, a glance will at once reveal that this image is not an early icon, for there are no early features whatsoever to be seen in it. In fact it is a work of the 20th century and happens to be the portrait of Aghori Baba who lived in Bankali in the latter half of the 19th century. After his death two of his devotees (father and son) installed this portrait in commemoration of the Baba. Failure to distinguish between the somewhat crude carving of early sculpture and a relatively new but also crude image may have led Pal to assign this image erroneously to the 4th century A.D.

Since all the early icons are undated, one may sometimes be led into unfounded speculation in ascribing an unacceptable date while dealing with such an intricate subject. Sometimes false notions of national pride may also obscure the vision of certain writers. Furthermore, some scholars holding old views and biased tendencies may see the early icons in a wrong perspective and still consider them as stray examples or offshoots of Gupta art. However, our detailed study was based on a careful comparison of tradition, styles, traits and iconographic forms with their counterparts in India. This eventually revealed that there are consistently different stylistic forms and distinct features evident in the early sculptures which are not found in the icons of a later period. This at once dissociates them from the images of the Licchavi, Thakuri and Malla periods.

[1] P. Pal, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
[2] Ibid., pp. 51-52, figs. 72, 73.

Summary and Conclusion

It is indeed quite astonishing that the Kathmandu valley, hitherto known for its isolation, has such a variety of icons, whose antiquity goes back to at least the 1st century A.D. Beginning from the early centuries of the Christian era the artists of Nepal have continued their sculptural tradition for nearly two thousand years. They not only absorbed religious concepts from India but also assimilated cultural traits and artistic ideas, and moulded the iconographic forms into their own styles with remarkable artistic vitality. Such examples are rare in the annals of art history.

Among the wealth of stone sculptures belonging to the early period, with the single exception of the Yaksha image from Hadigaon (Pl. 1), almost all are diminutive in size. Their iconographic traits are rather simple and the workmanship somewhat coarse, similar to Kushana images of folk divinities. They lack the refined sophistication of the Licchavi sculptures or the stylized form of the Thakuri images. A minute observation of the early sculptures also shows that the Bhagavata, Pasupata, Saura and Sakta cults were prevalent as early as the 2nd century A.D. As far as the iconographic elements and stylistic forms of these sculptures are concerned, the influence of the Mathura-Kushana tradition is apparent. From the second half of the 4th century A.D., a gradual transformation took place. From this evolved a fundamental change in the basic concept of style, based on native aesthetics or local tradition. Though shortlived, a few images were carved during the period, the iconographic peculiarities of which have already been discussed; their facial features were more ethnic than Aryan (Pls. 85, 98).

This period may be regarded as the beginning of a transitory stage in the history of Nepalese sculpture, and also be marked by a total departure from the Mathura-Kushana tradition. From this period onwards, say the middle half of the 4th century A.D., the heavy, bulky and massive forms were replaced by sophisticated and highly stylized lines, accentuated by proportion and linear harmony. This transformation seems to have been due to new socio-political elements or the rise of the feudal lords under the Licchavis, though it is very difficult to say clearly. Although the Licchavi were among the earliest immigrants to have come from the south, it appears that they were able to carve out a kingdom and establish the Licchavi dynasty only after the middle half of the 4th century A.D. A comprehensive study and the iconographic development of the early sculptures of Nepal attest to this. This evidence is further enhanced by the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta already referred to. It may also be surmised that the Licchavis of Nepal were in close contact with the Guptas of India as early as the 4th century A.D. Obviously, the art of the Licchavi period was tempered by the Gupta tradition. Thus, under the patronage of the Licchavi kings a new tradition was established which lasted for nearly five hundred years, that is, from the 4th century to the 9th century A.D.

A motif or style may last a few hundred years after it undergoes a complete change, overlapped or obliterated by another, stronger element that dominates society. Through new religious missions or political development, a new tradition may spring up. This is what seems to have occurred in the sculptural art of Nepal after the rise of the Licchavis, for the art of the Licchavi period, well known for its refinement and sophisticated quality, appears to have eclipsed or at least overshadowed the entire art form

of the early period. Later on the impact of Gupta art opened up a new horizon and introduced a new concept to Nepalese sculptors. The figure of the deity based on a more disciplined form, imbued with linear fluency and natural grace, is the characteristic of the Licchavi style. By the latter half of the 5th century there was already a new, well-established tradition of sculptural art as evidenced by the two earliest dated images of Vishnu-Vikranta from Lazimpat and Tilganga (Pls. 155, 156).

The artists of the Licchavi period were as prolific as they were assimilative. During this period a large number of Brahmanical as well as Buddhist images were made which served as prototypes for the art of the Thakuri and Malla periods. Under these circumstances old idols and sculptures, partly damaged, neglected or even unidentified were removed and replaced by newer images according to the fashion of the time. As a result, the old ones seem to have been stacked in the temple precincts or embedded in the walls. No wonder, then, that a large number of ancient icons were discovered either in an unpretentious temple or shrine, or sometimes in ancient fountains (*dharas*) and in other most unlikely places. Almost all of them are broken, mutilated and abraded. Across the long span of many centuries, they must have experienced the vicissitudes of different elements of religions and cults, and even the mode of esoteric worship.In many places, we see a number of images separated from the group and no longer worshipped. An image, worshipped and revered at one time, which gradually gained ascendency after a few centuries, finally receded into the background. Such images are likely to have been removed from their original sanctum and left neglected. The Yaksha image from Hadigaon (Pl. 1) is an example.

Our research covers the period from the 1st century A.D. to the first half of the 5th century A.D., regarded as an unknown period in our history. The written material about these centuries is very scanty and offers almost no positive evidence. Furthermore, no scholar has as yet attempted to bridge the gap between the 1st century A.D. and the inscribed images of the 5th century A.D. No one knows for sure the political and social history of this period. However, the recent discovery of many new materials during our research has thrown much new light on the subject. As we have now seen, this period was marked by a remarkably high production of Brahmanical sculptures. This sculptural evidence will surely help us understand more fully the cultural and religious activities of the people of Nepal before the rise of the Licchavis, whose proper dynastic line was most probably established by the 4th century A.D. or slightly later.

The cultural history of ancient Nepal shows a considerable growth of cult images from the beginning of the 1st century of the Christian era, and especially an overwhelming popularity in the worship of Mother Goddesses. The mother cult symbolizing the fertile force was prevalent from remote times, and had a very distinctive character in the early art of Nepal. For the indigenous people of the valley as well as the Indo-Aryan people who migrated here, she was the protective deity and was worshipped by both Aryans and non-Aryans with equal veneration. The reverence for this ancient and primitive goddess has a long history and even today she is worshipped with much the same zeal under various names. Thus, the mother cult was a predominant feature while Yaksha and Naga were also popular as folk deities. Authorities like A.K. Coomaraswamy and V.S. Agrawala have remarked that both Yaksha and Naga are aboriginal non-Aryan types. In the remote past Yaksha was regarded as the tutelary goblin of a bucolic spirit who is said to inhabit fields, trees and forests. Among the villagers in India he is still worshipped in the same manner.

The sculptural art of India in anthropomorphic form actually begins with the Yaksha images of the 3rd century B.C. Curiously in Nepal, too, sculptural art begins with the Yaksha image of Hadigaon of the 1st century A.D.

With regard to our present study of early Nepalese sculpture, one final word may be said. Artists of the valley of the Bagmati were in close contact with north India, in particular the Mathura region of the Abhiras from the very beginning of the Christian era or even slightly earlier. As the bulk of early images was found in Balkhu, Kirtipur, Patan, Pasupati, Deo Patan and Hadigaon, early settlement must have been concentrated in those areas.

In every case possible, comparisons have been drawn with Indian sculpture. On the basis of meticulous and detailed study, one can now establish the chronological framework and stylistic evolution of these ancient sculptures and assign a reasonable date to many of them. Furthermore, we have shown the striking contrast between these early sculptures and those of the succeeding Licchavi, Thakuri and Malla periods.

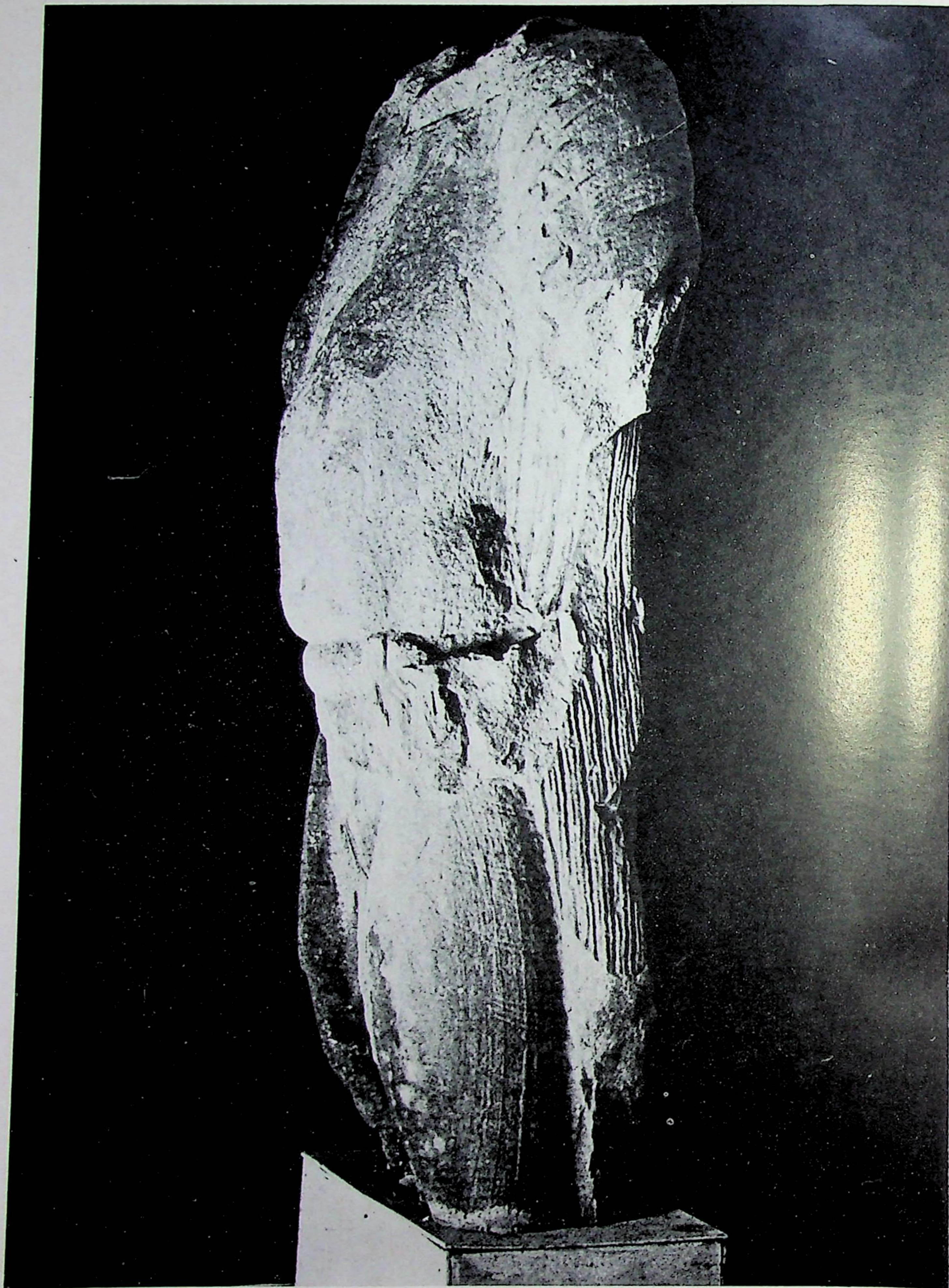
For me, it has been fascinating these past fifteen years, carrying out this research on early sculptures. It was a privilege to have travelled extensively in India, Pakistan, the Soviet Union, China, Europe and the U.S., visiting historical places and museums of the world. Then to have so many art objects of the 1st to 5th centuries A.D. turn up right at our doorstep, has been astonishing. Just to be able to discover a chain of unknown early sculptures and to fill in several centuries of hitherto little-known Nepalese history has been extremely rewarding.

This survey has yielded about forty ancient sculptures belonging to the early centuries of the Christian era which were never discussed by or even known to previous writers. These newly discovered sculptures undoubtedly throw an interesting light on the obscure beginnings of Nepalese art in and around the valley of Kathmandu. It must also be pointed out that a few specimens of early sculpture, parallels of which are not known even in Indian art, have been included. The date attached to some of these sculptures may not be acceptable to some scholars as views may differ. However, it must be acknowledged that the survey has brought forward a mass of evidence to show unmistakeable conventions of early Nepalese iconography, opening a new chapter for the student of Nepalese art. This, as well as a comprehensive study of these ancient icons will shed new light on the early history of Nepal.

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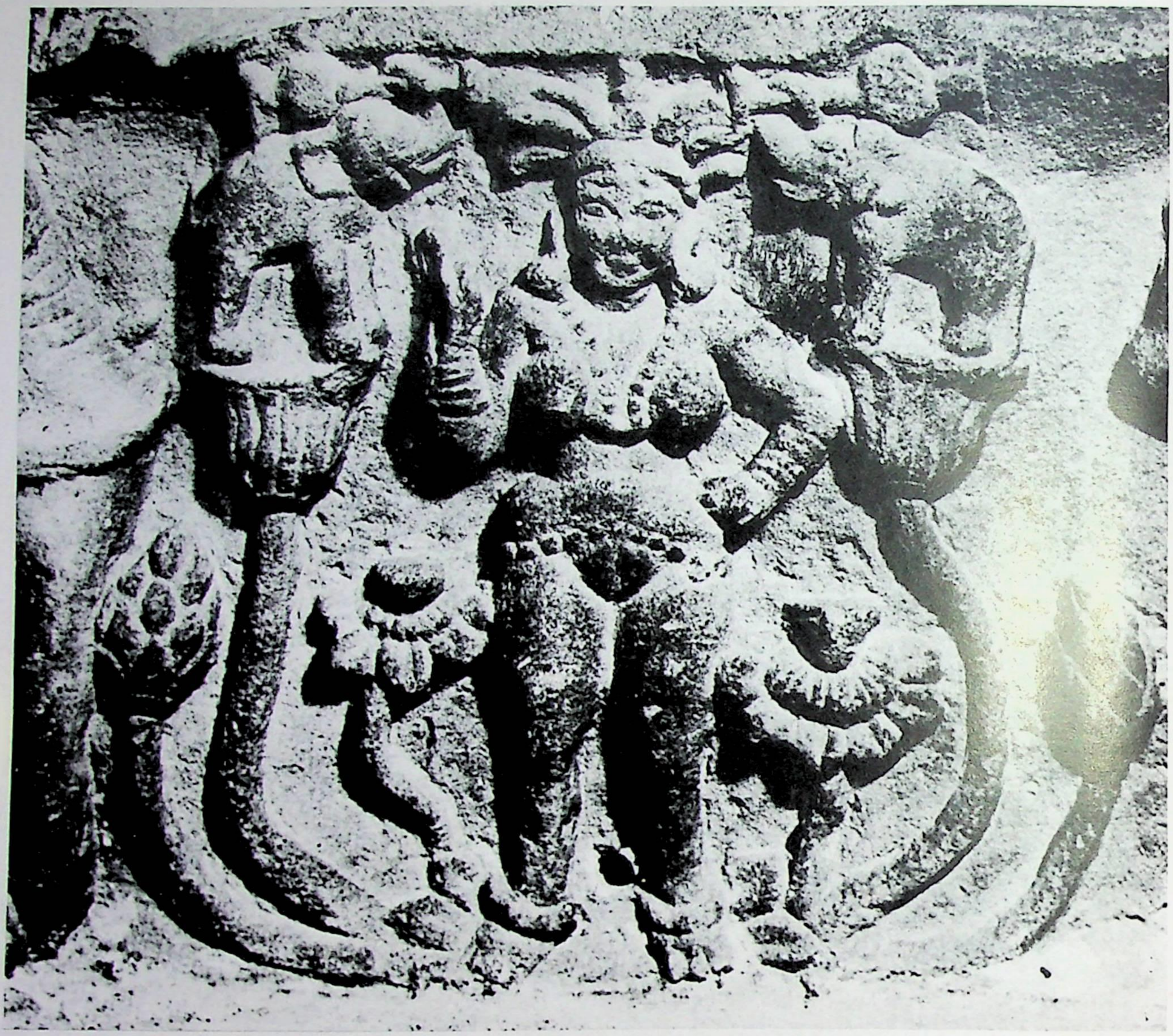
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Pl.15. Mother Goddess, Kotallor, Hadigaon, 2nd-3rd centuries, A.D.



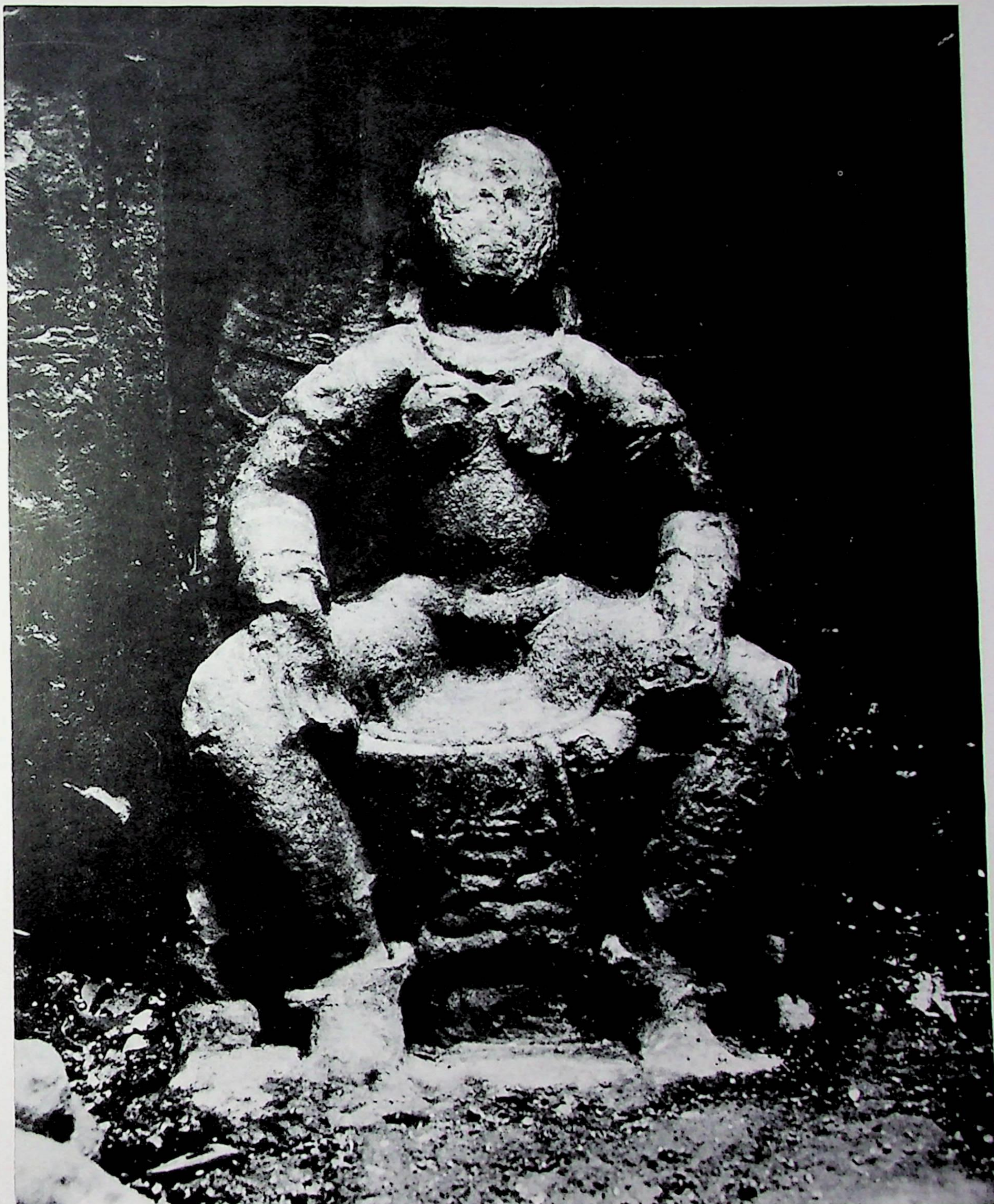
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Pl.20. Kumari, Balkhu, 2nd-3rd centuries A.D.



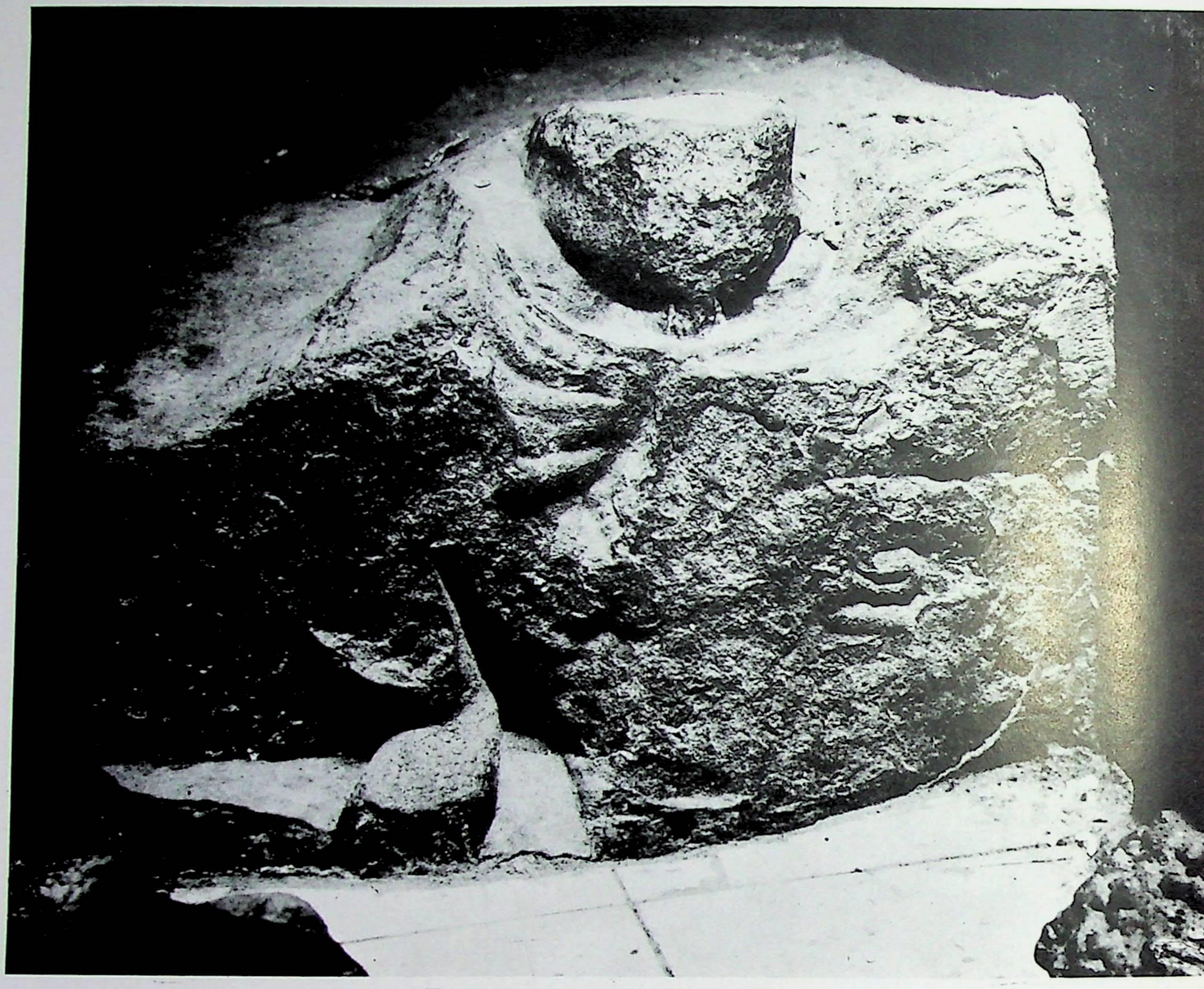
Pl.21. Vaisnavi, Balkhu, 2nd-3rd centuries A.D.



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Pl.26. Matrika, Bagalamukhi Temple (Patan), 2nd-3rd centuries A.D.



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Pl.33. Mahesvari, Bhagavati Temple, Deo Patan, 2nd-3rd centuries A.D.



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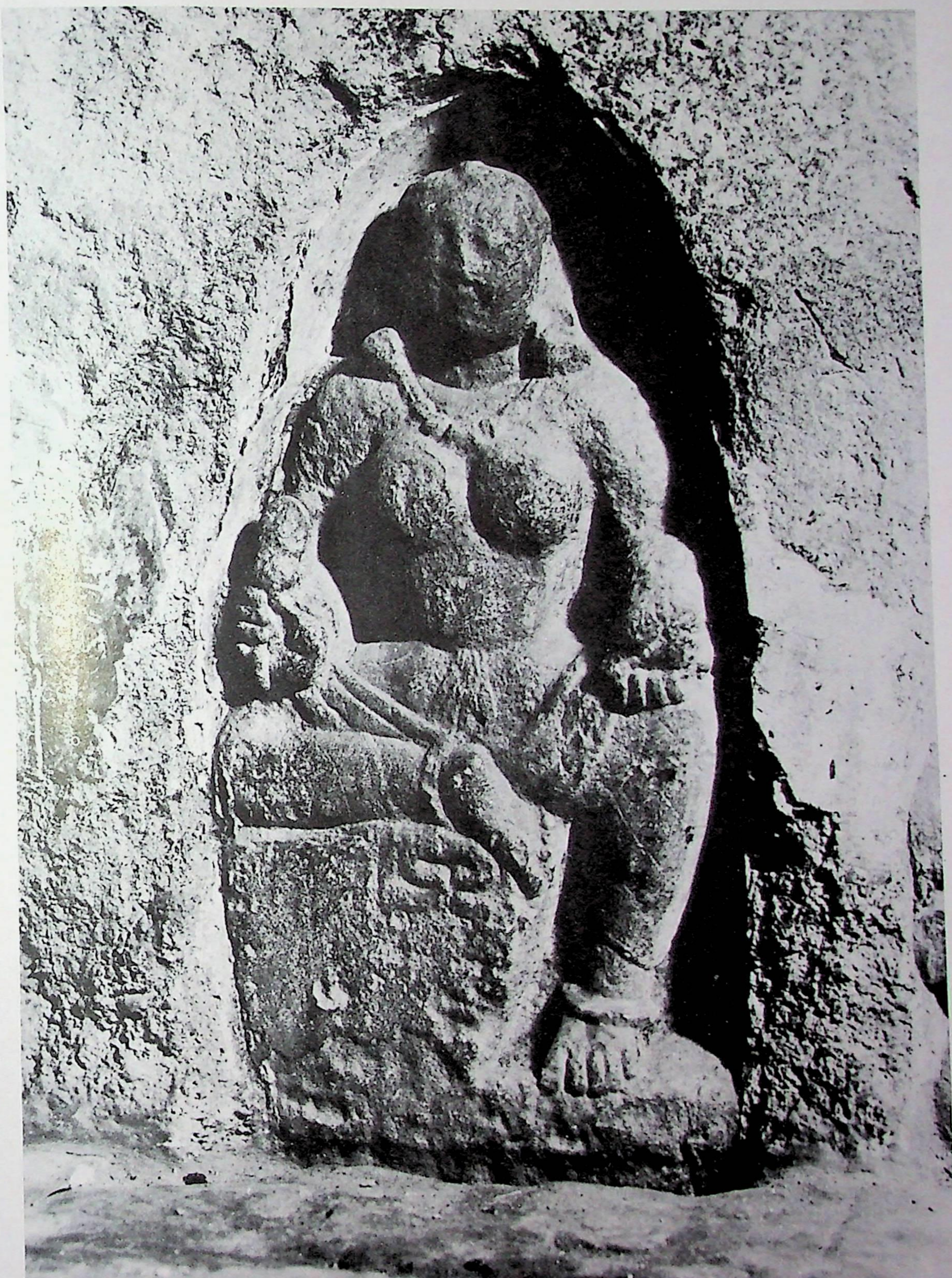
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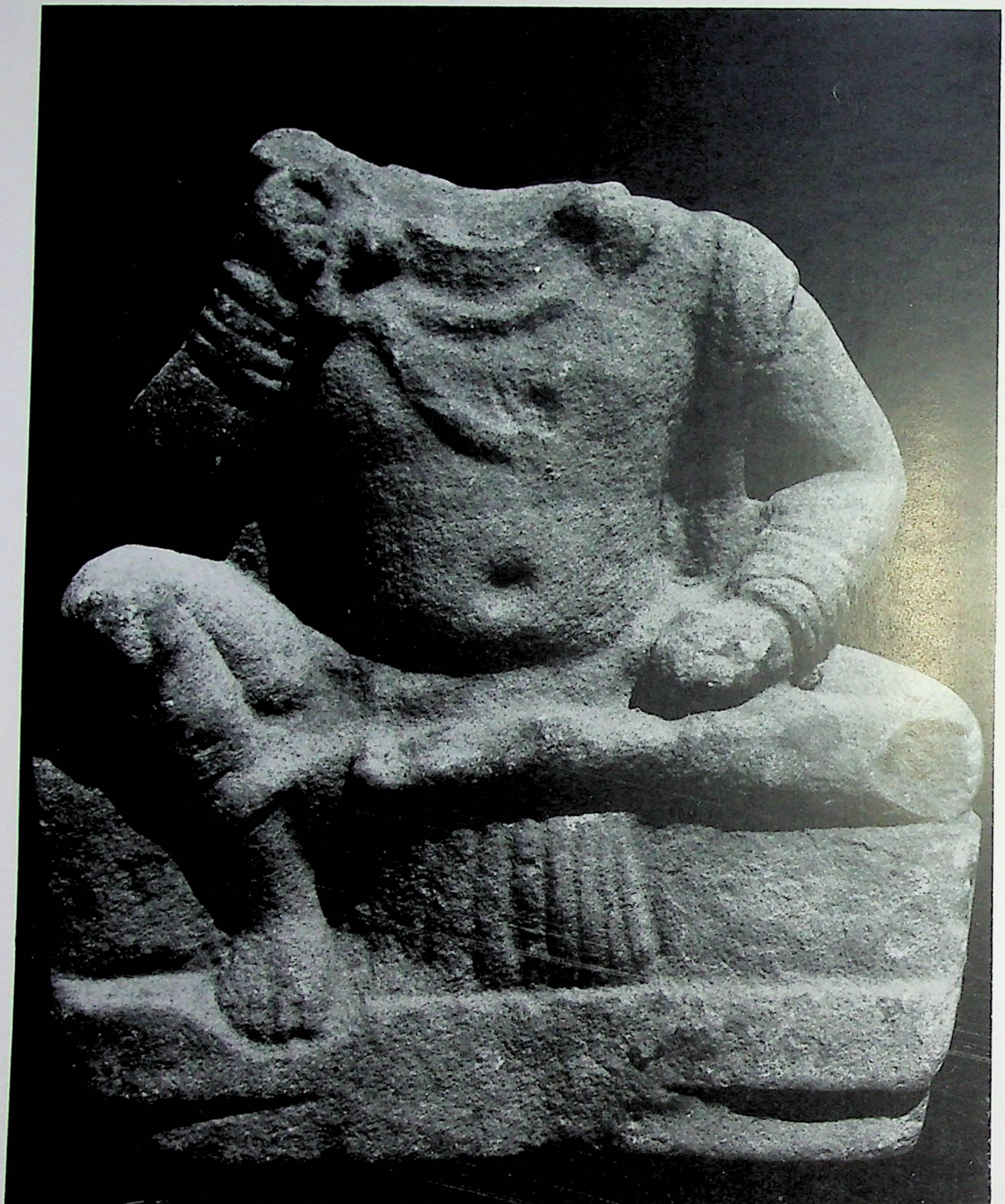
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Pl.78. Kubera, Mathura Museum (India), Kushana period.



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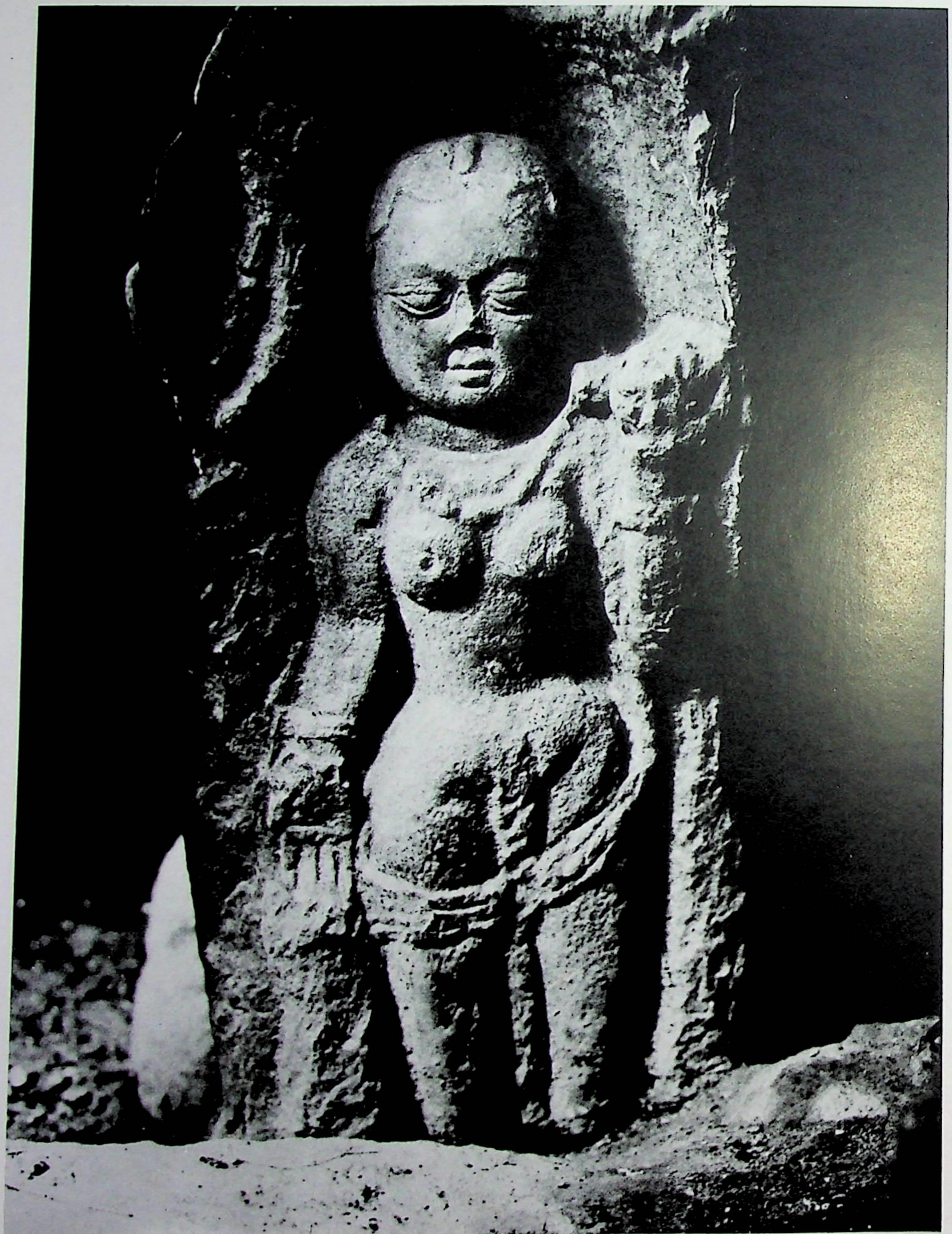
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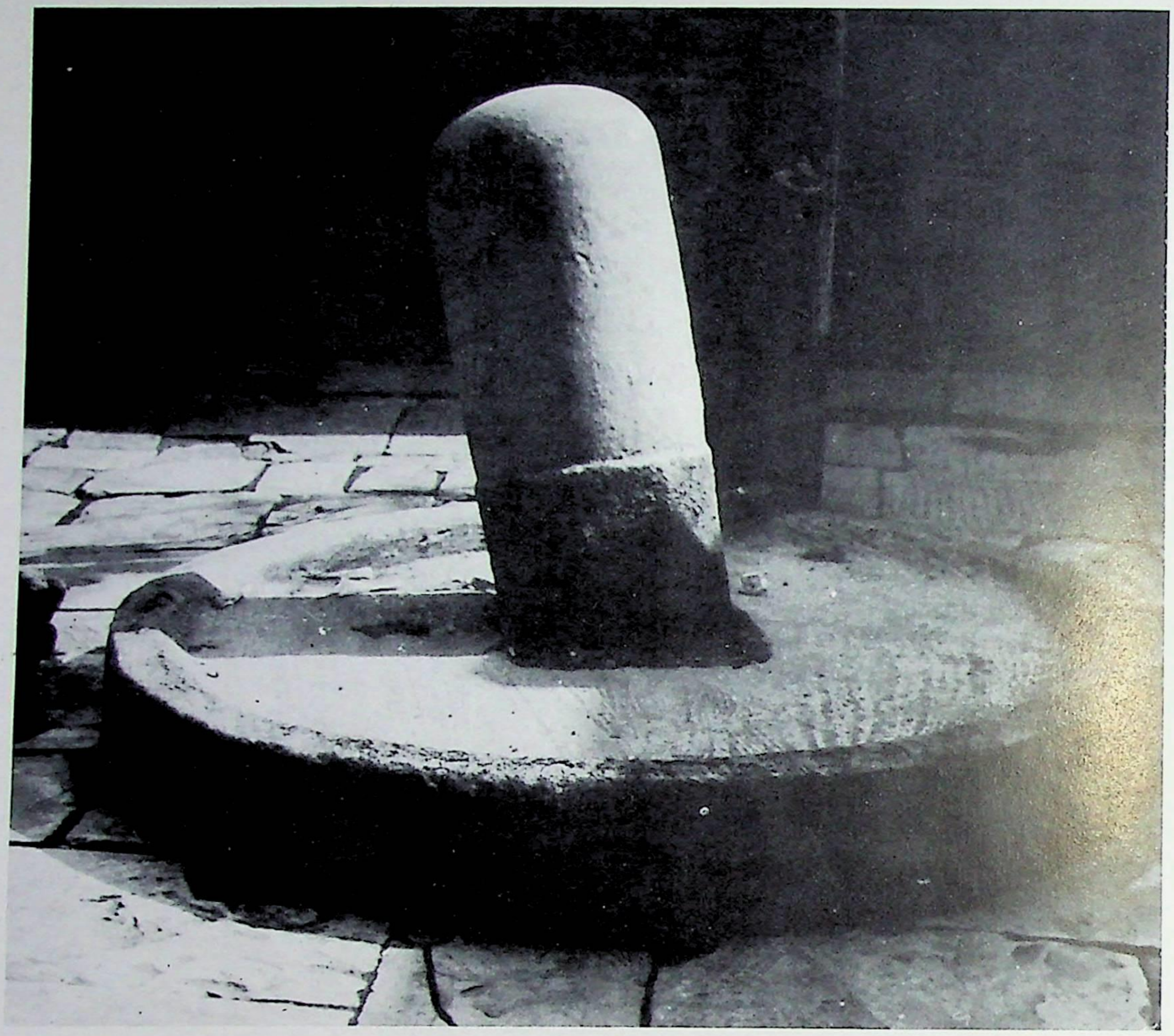
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Pl.88a. Worship of Siva-Linga, Mathura Museum (India), 1st century A.D.



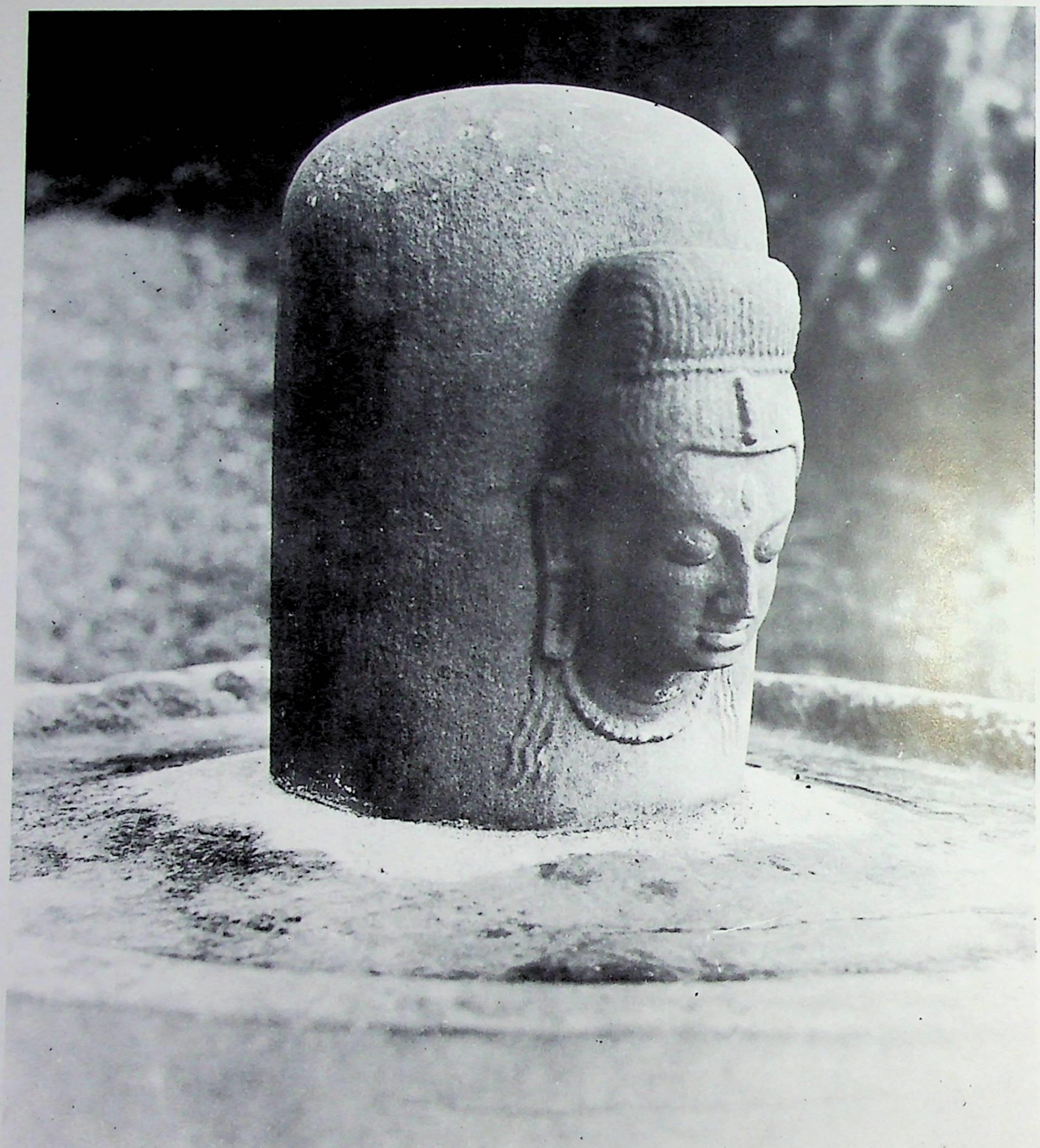
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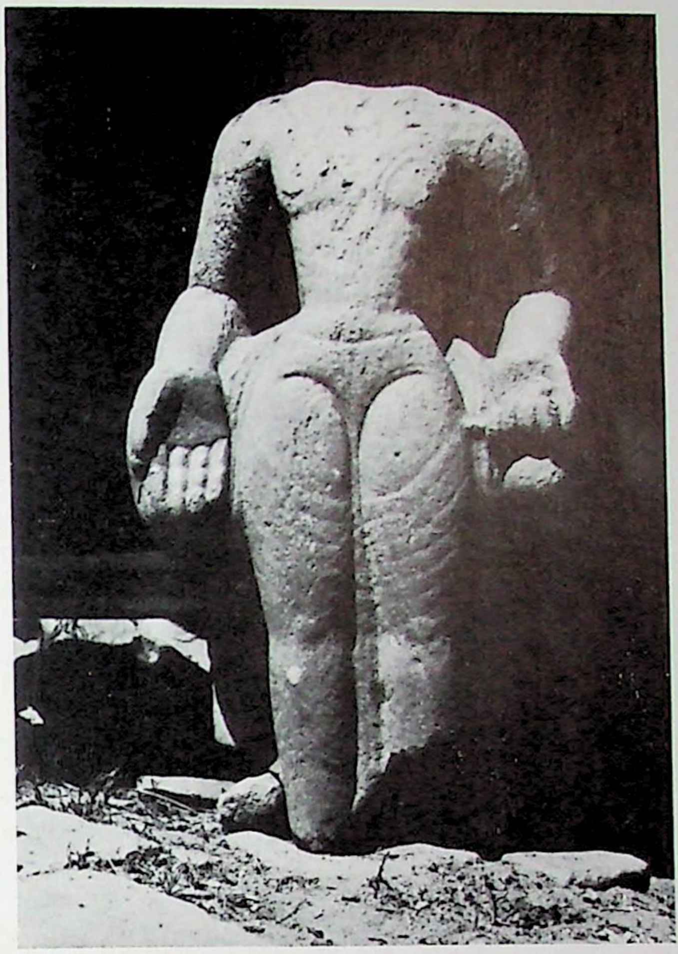
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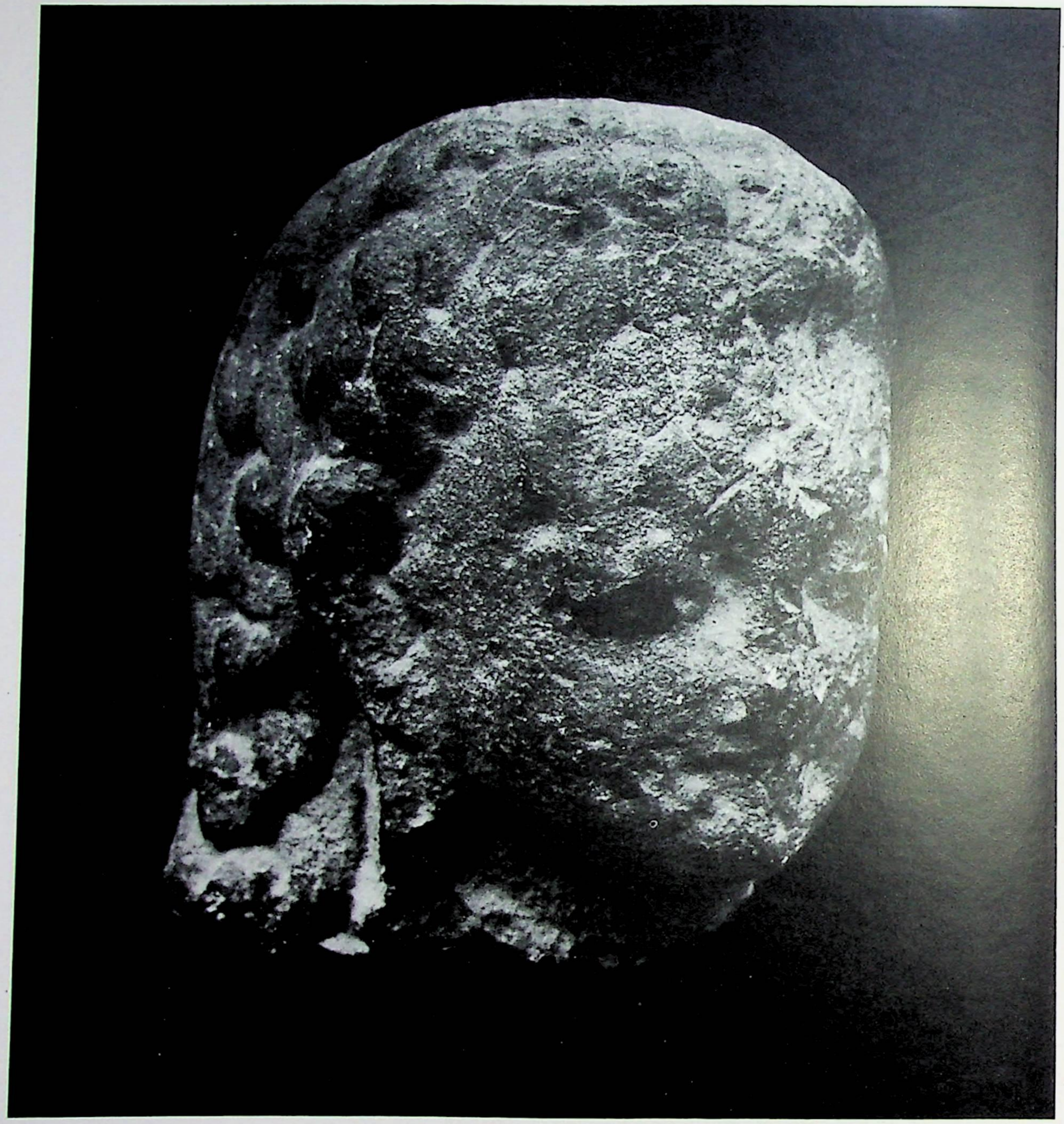
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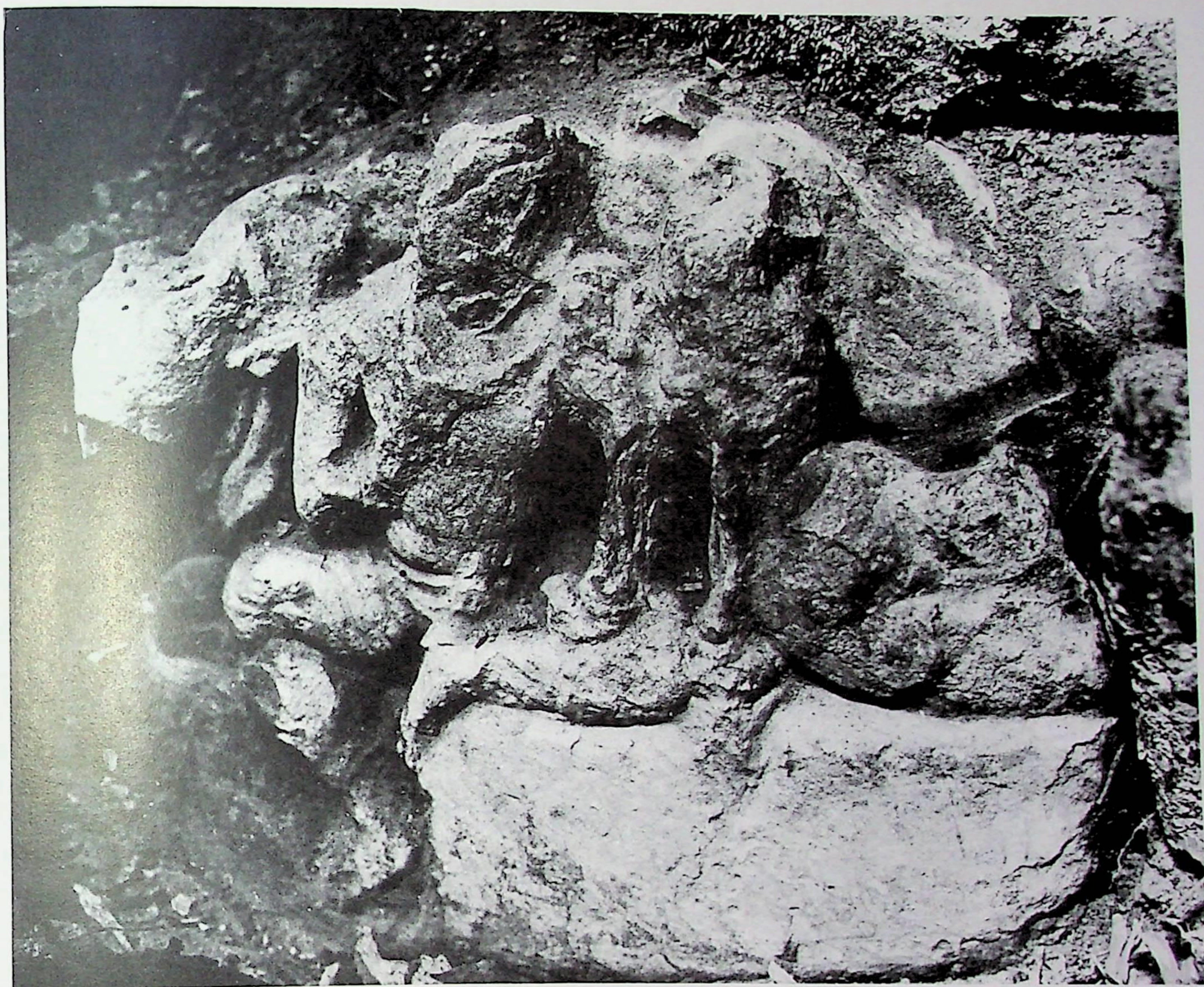
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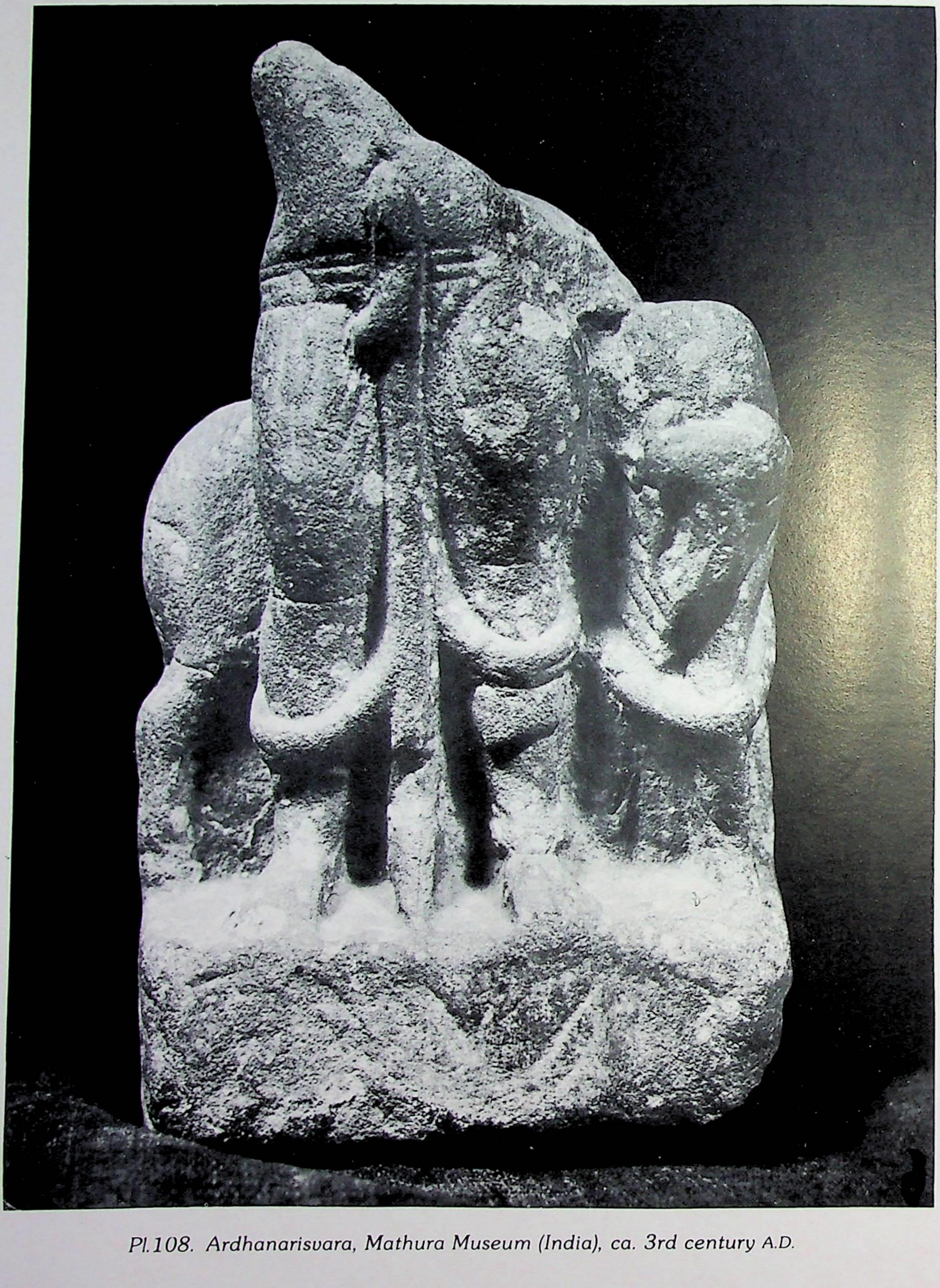
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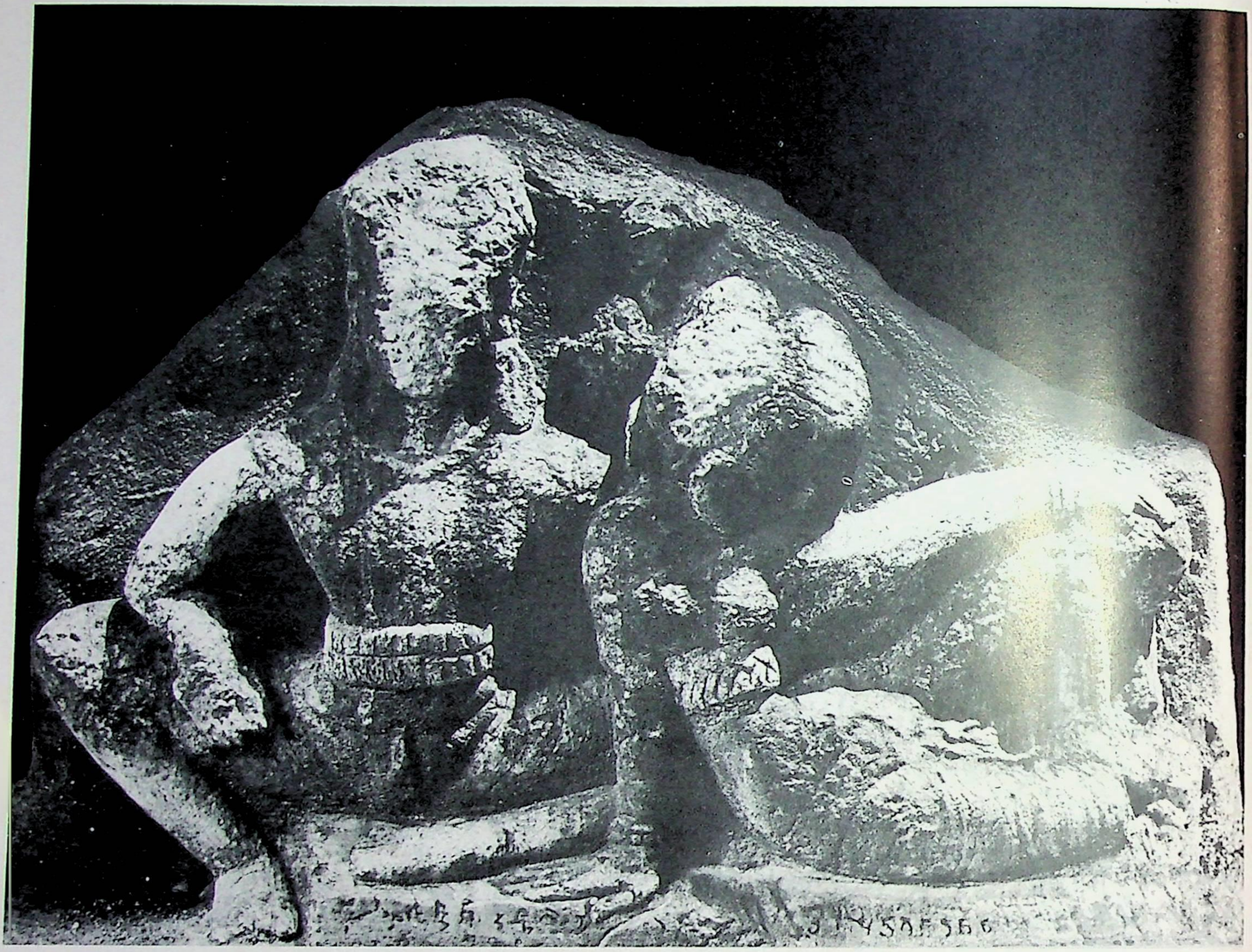
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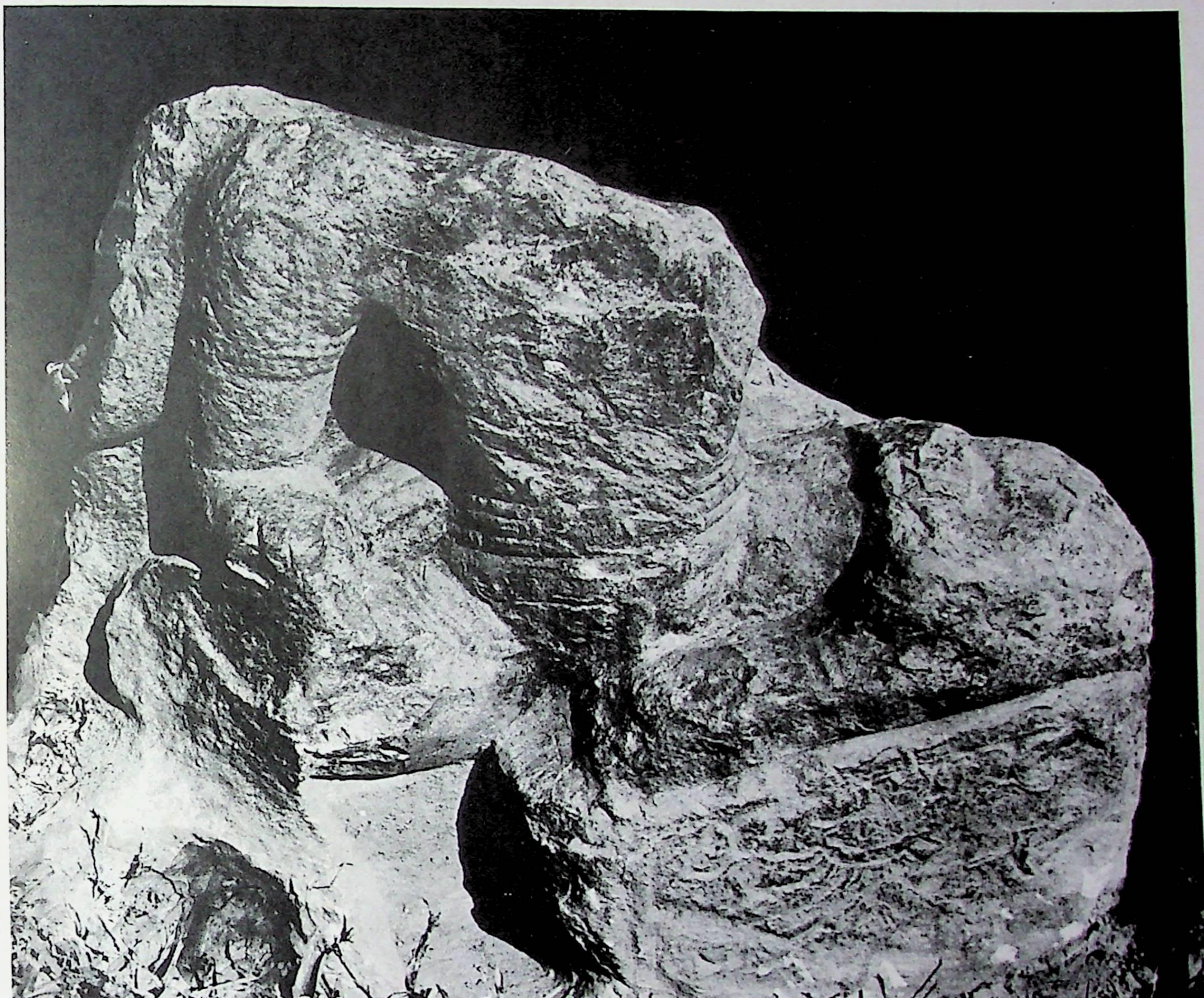
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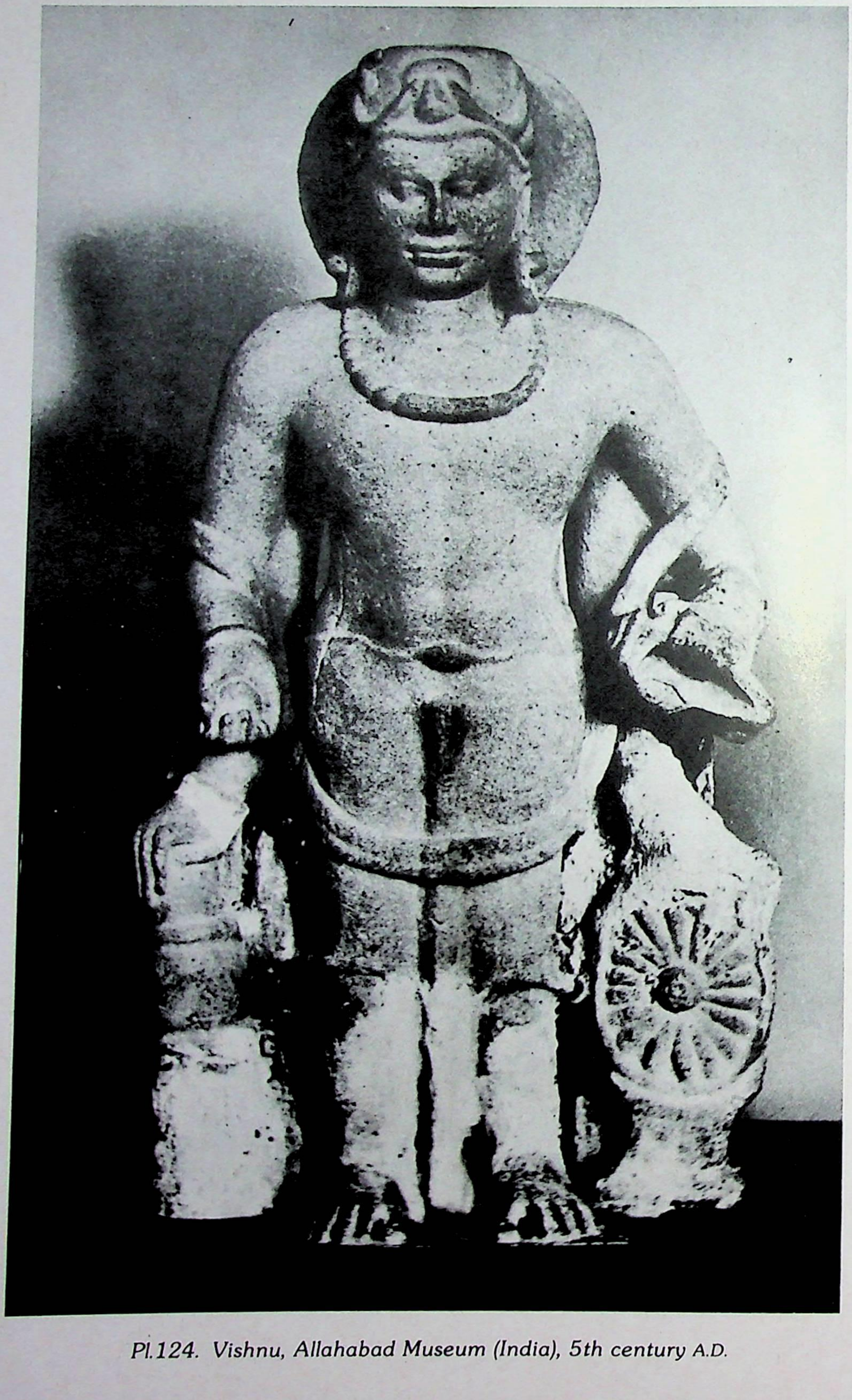
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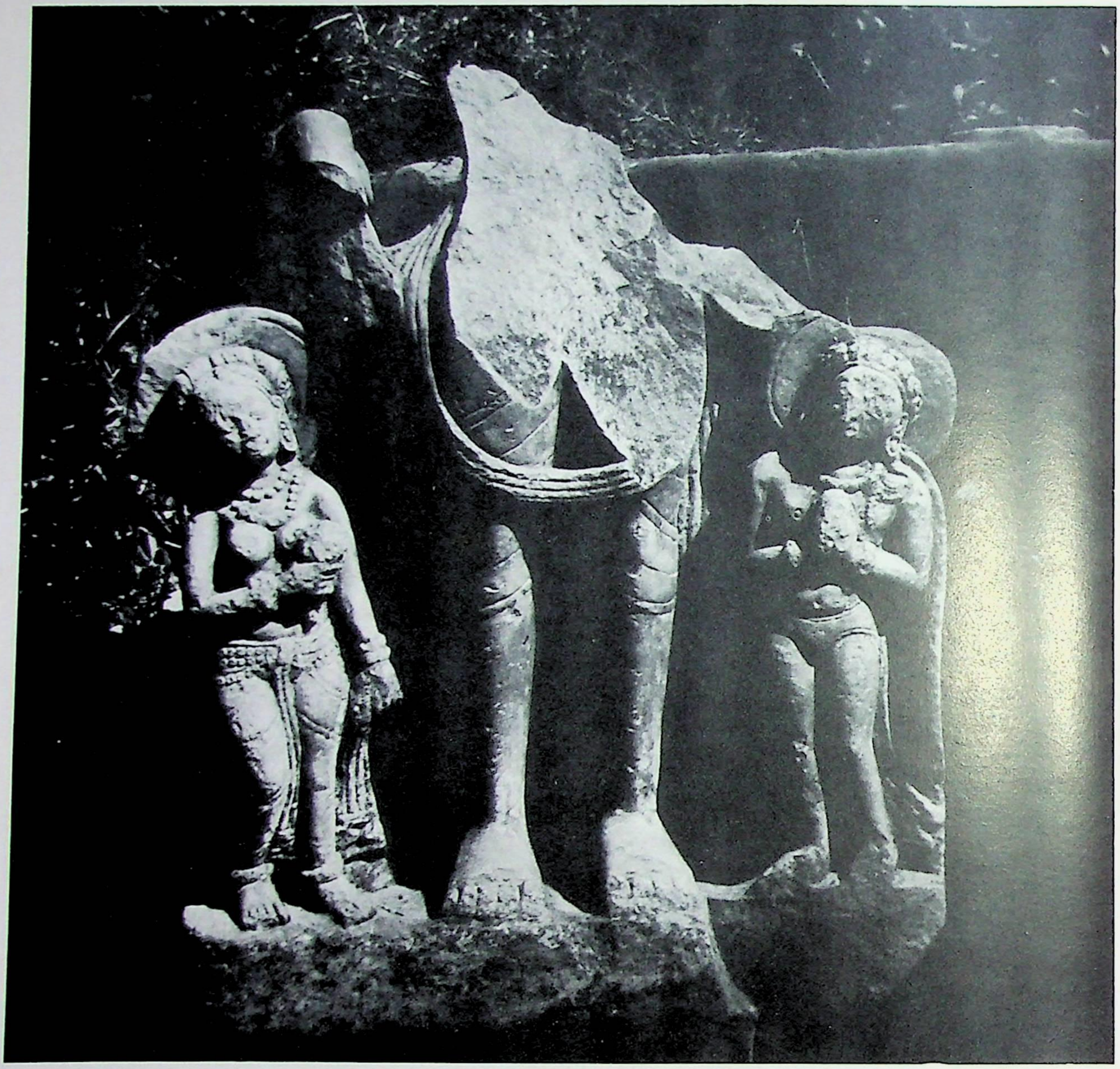
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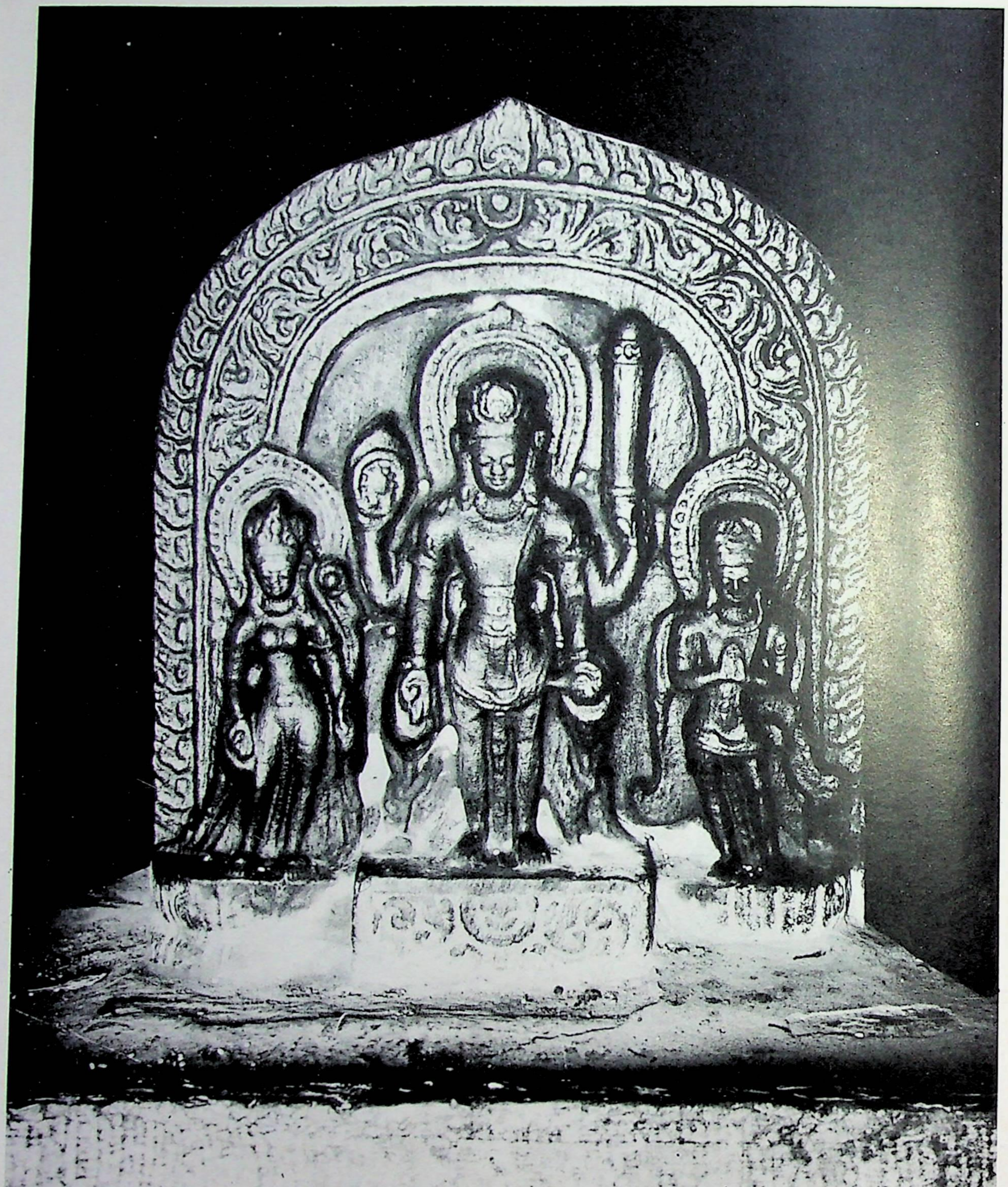
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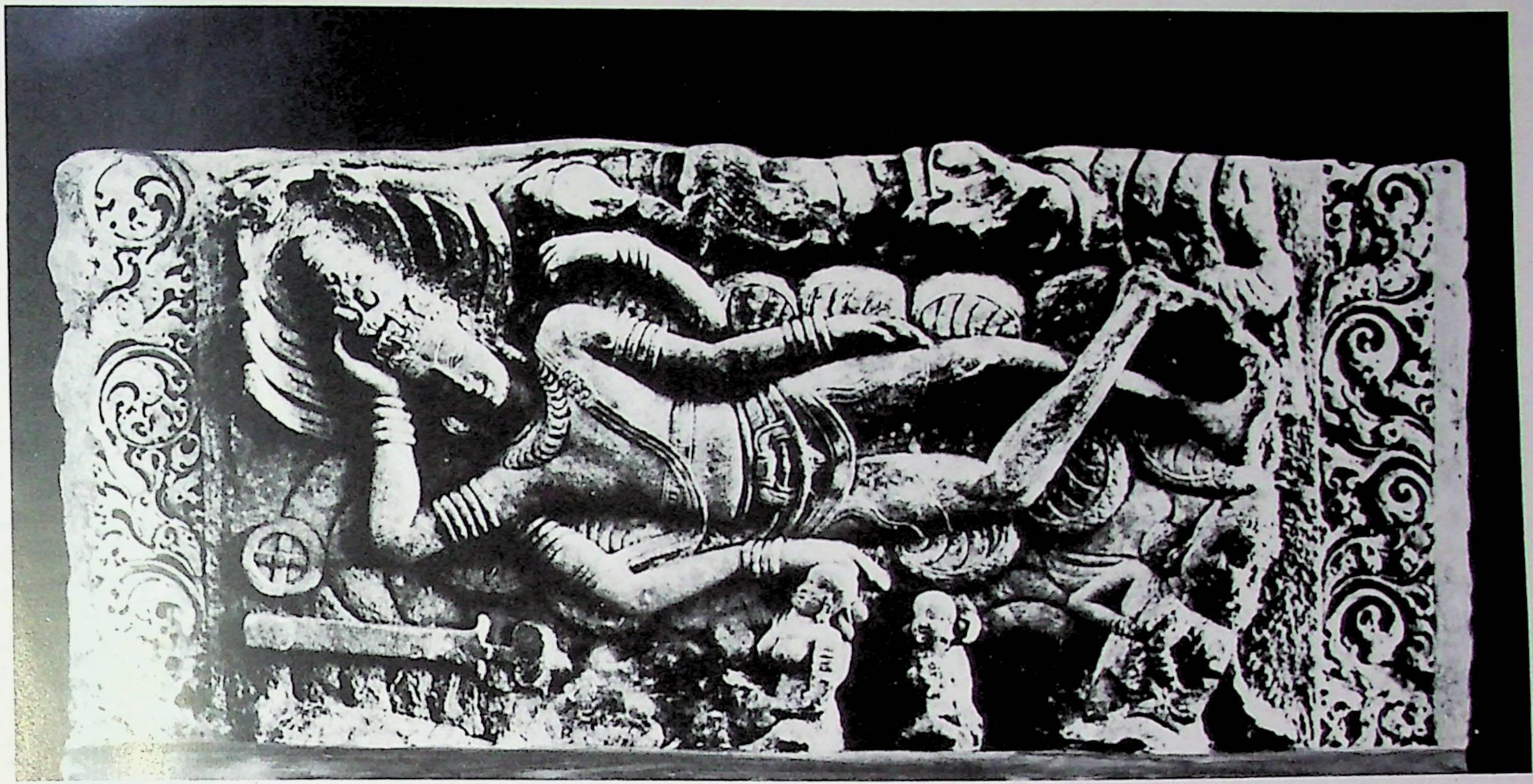
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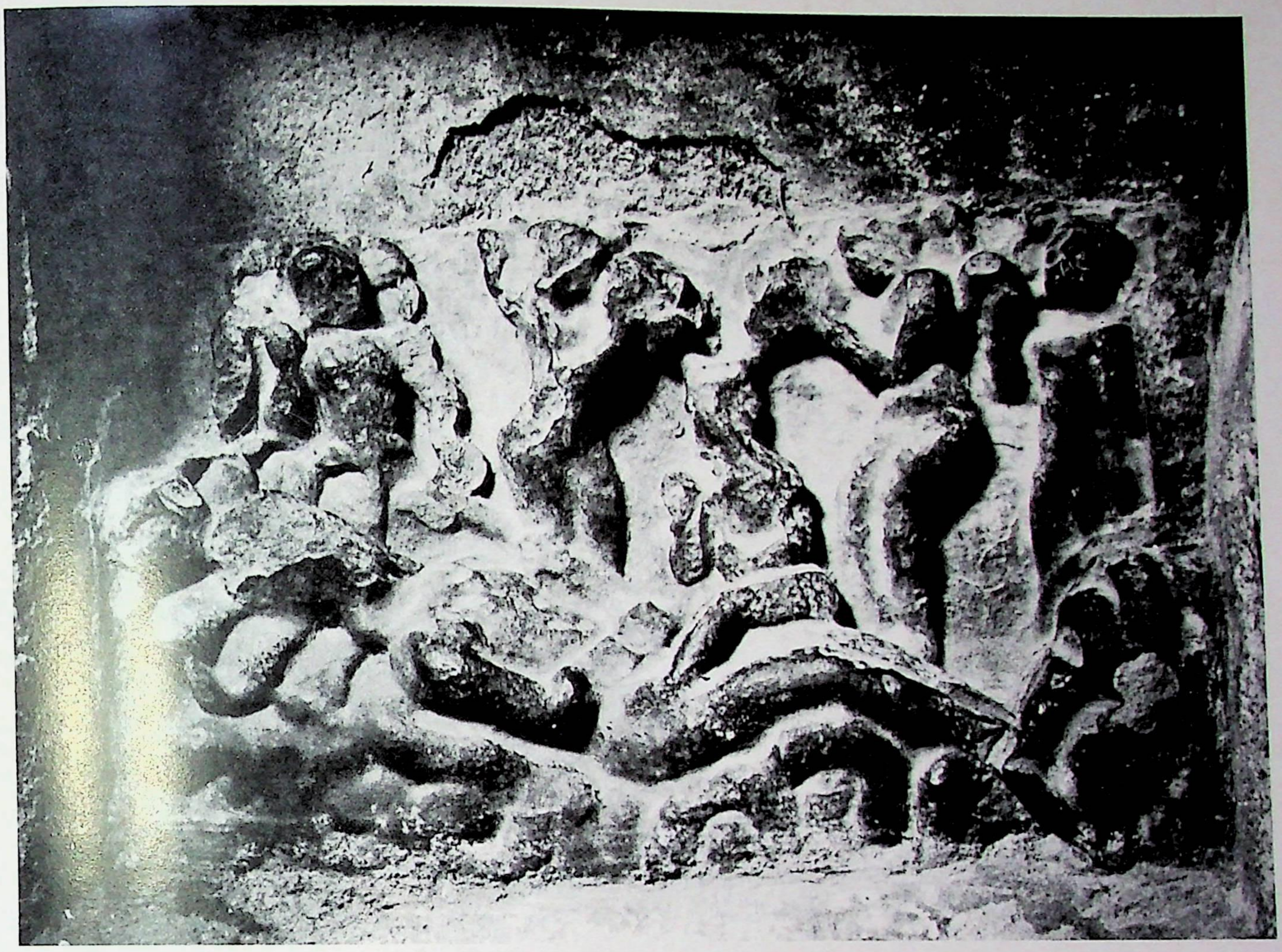
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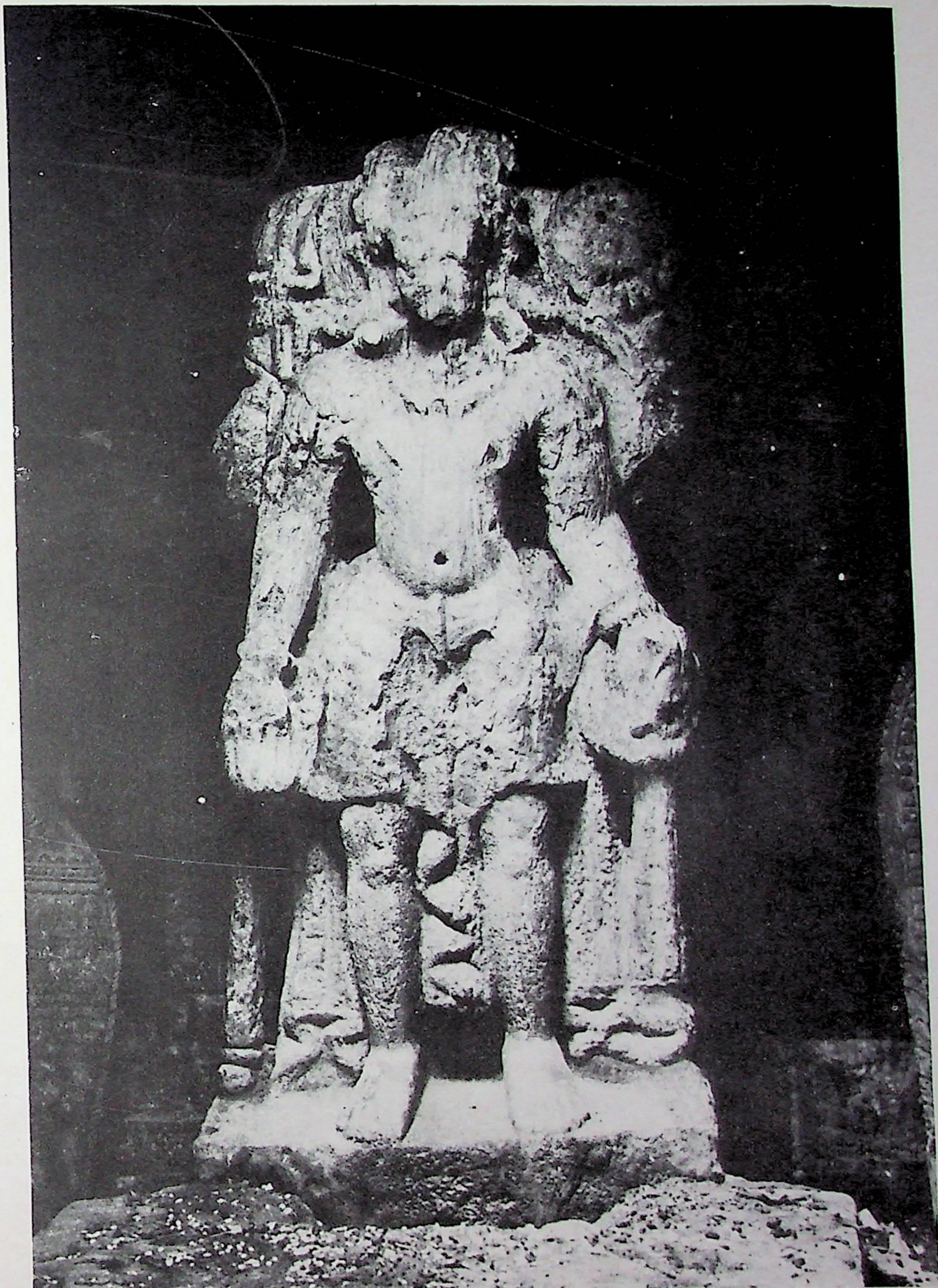
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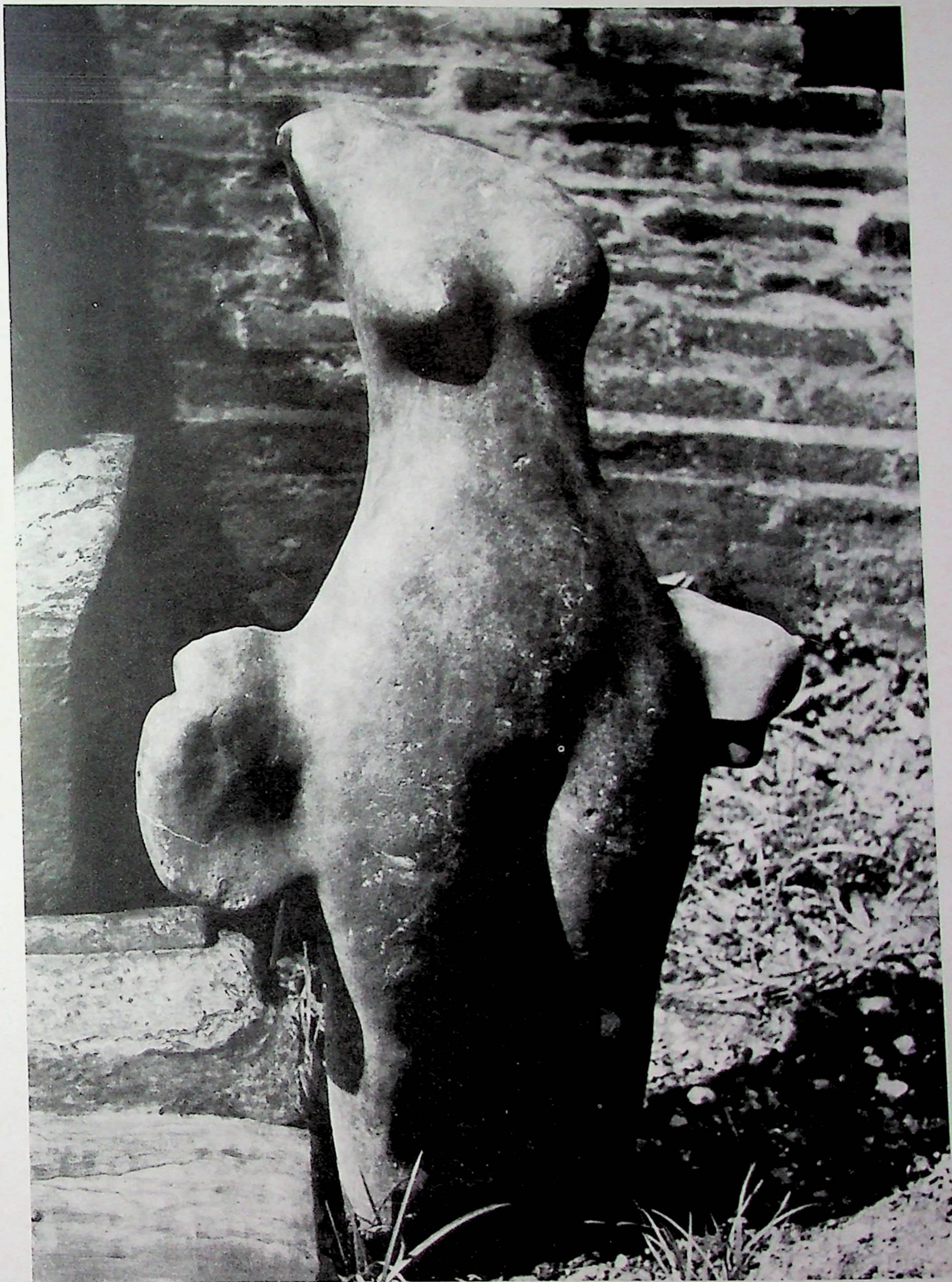
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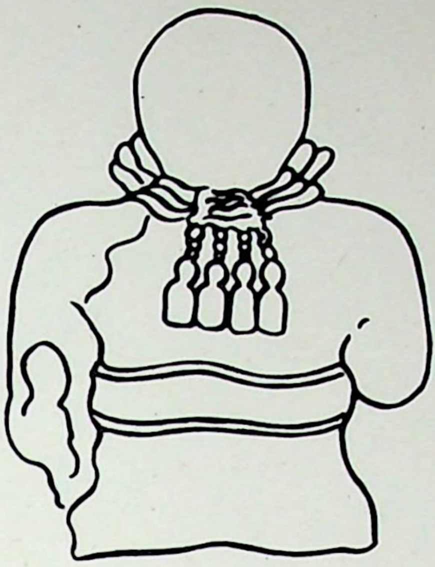


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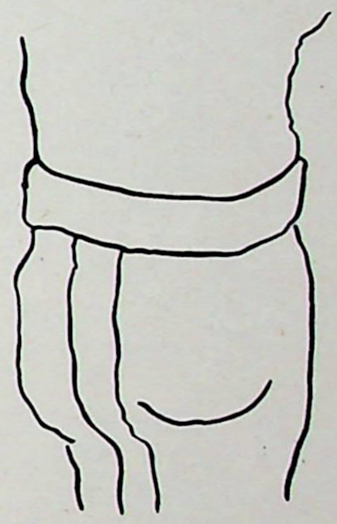


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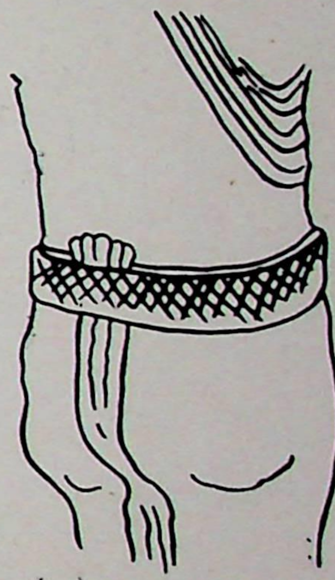


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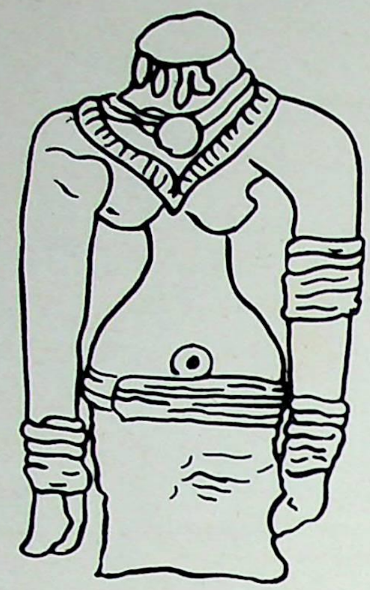


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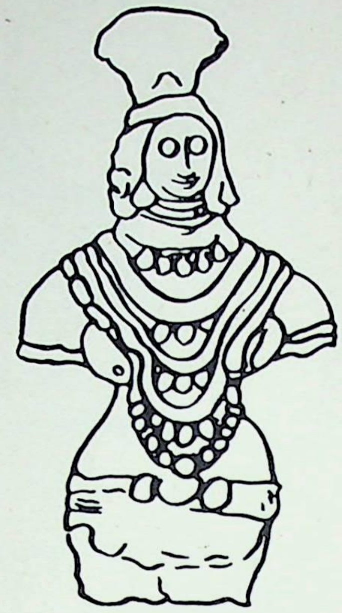


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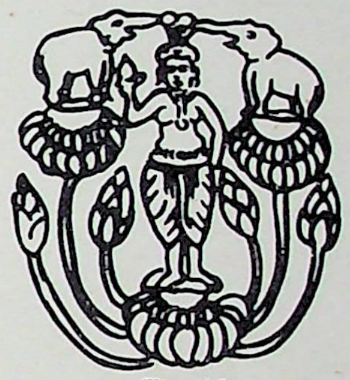


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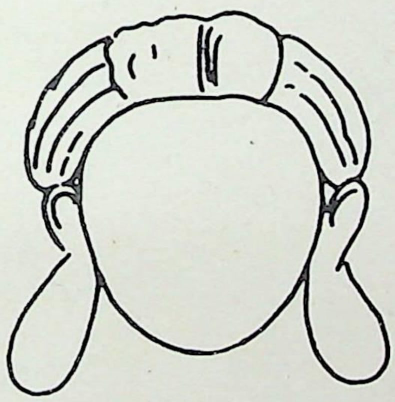


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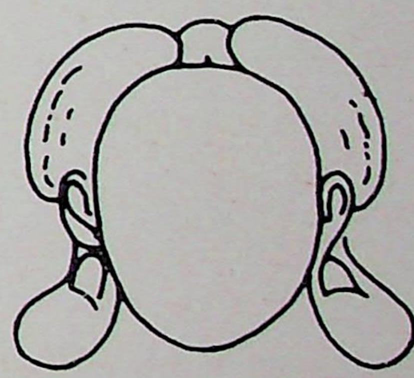


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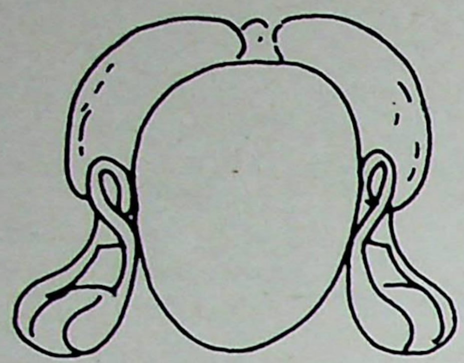


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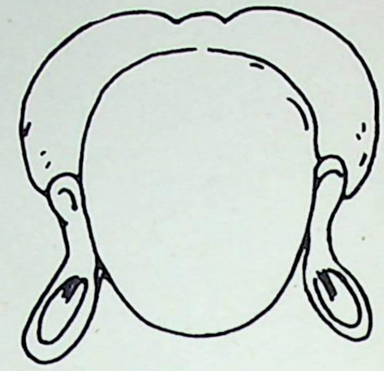


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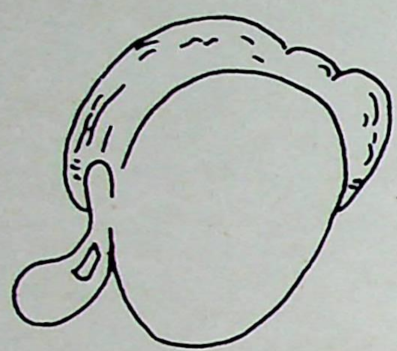


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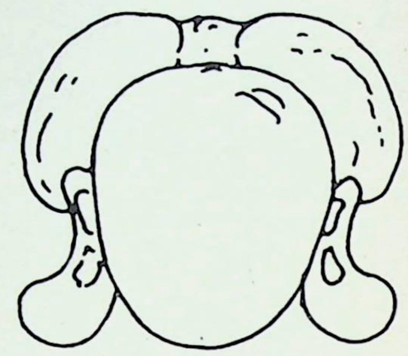


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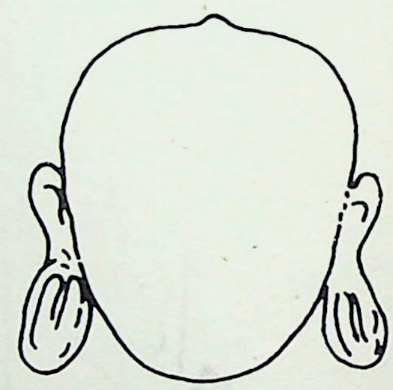


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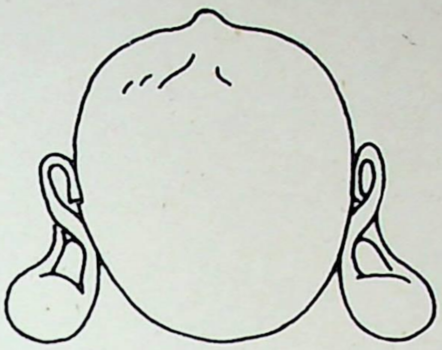


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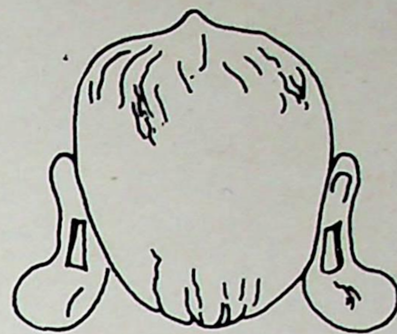


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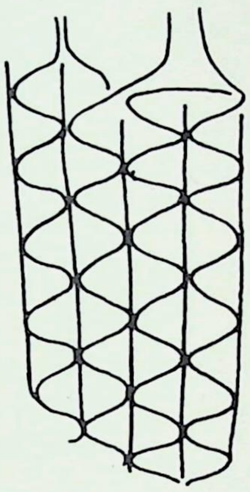


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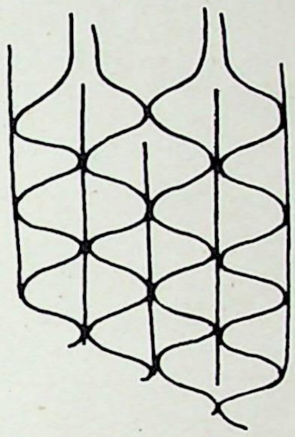


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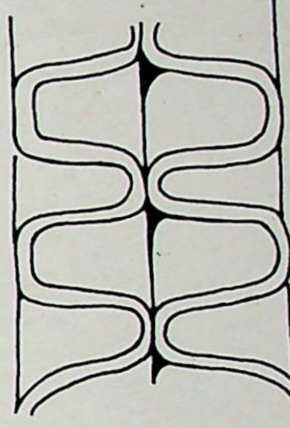


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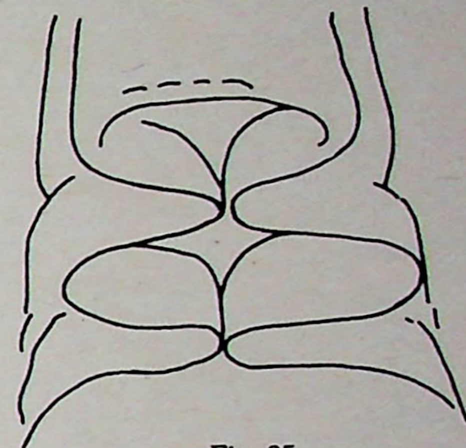


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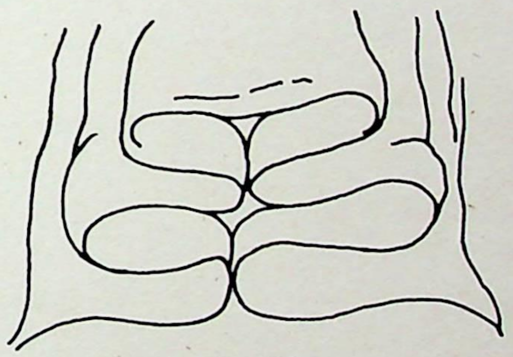


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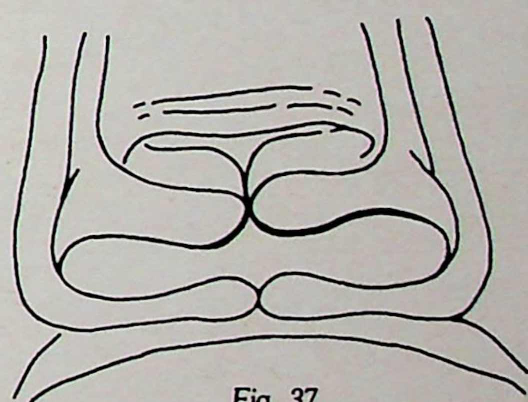


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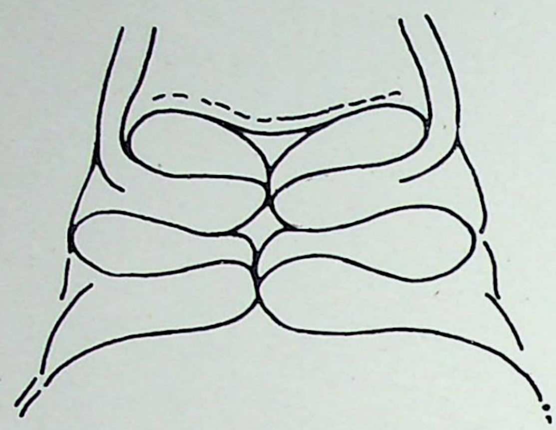


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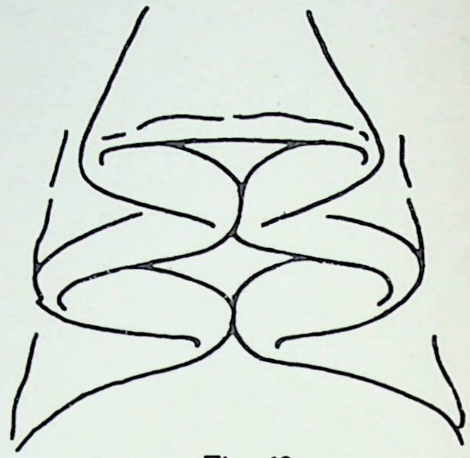


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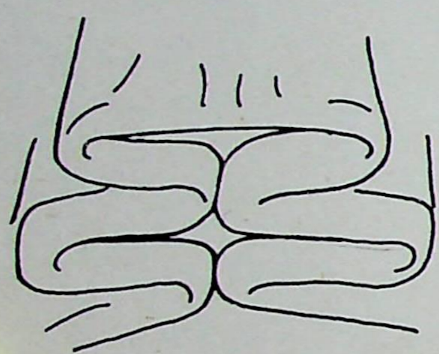


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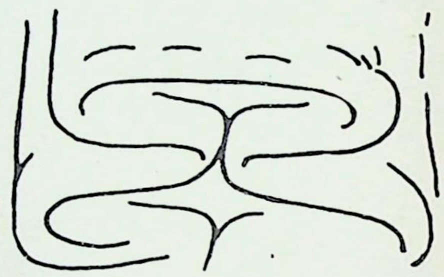


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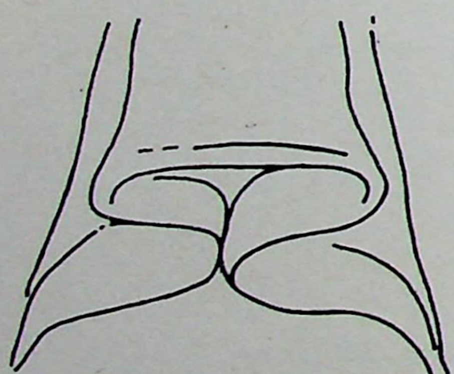


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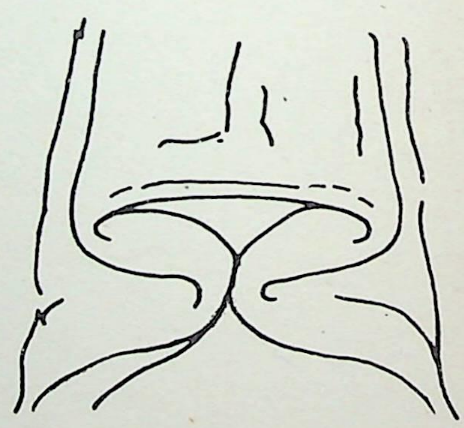


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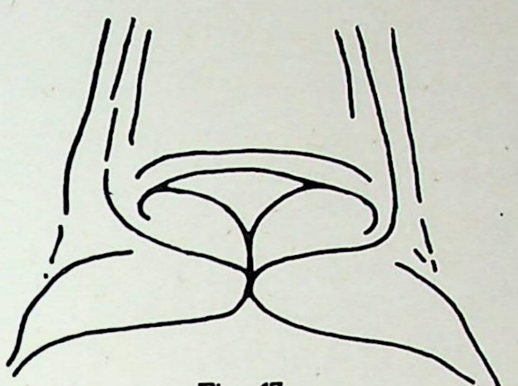


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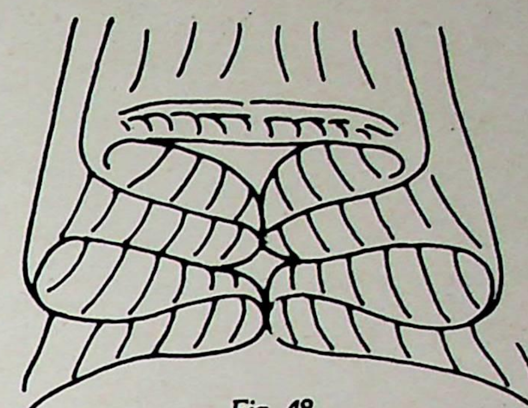


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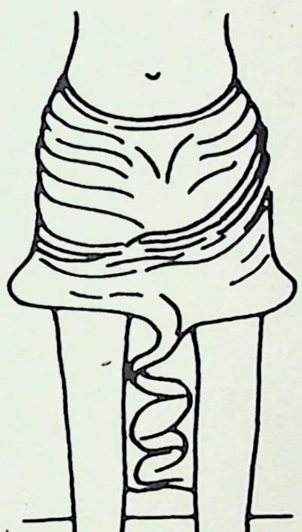


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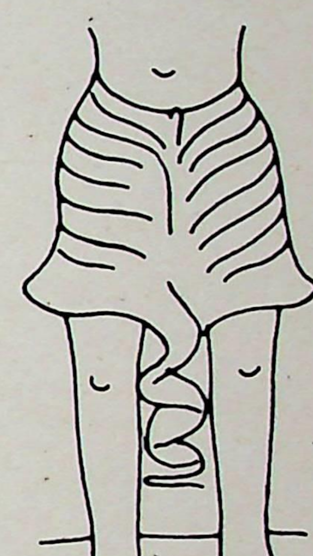


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